Supporting vulnerable girls in shaping their lives

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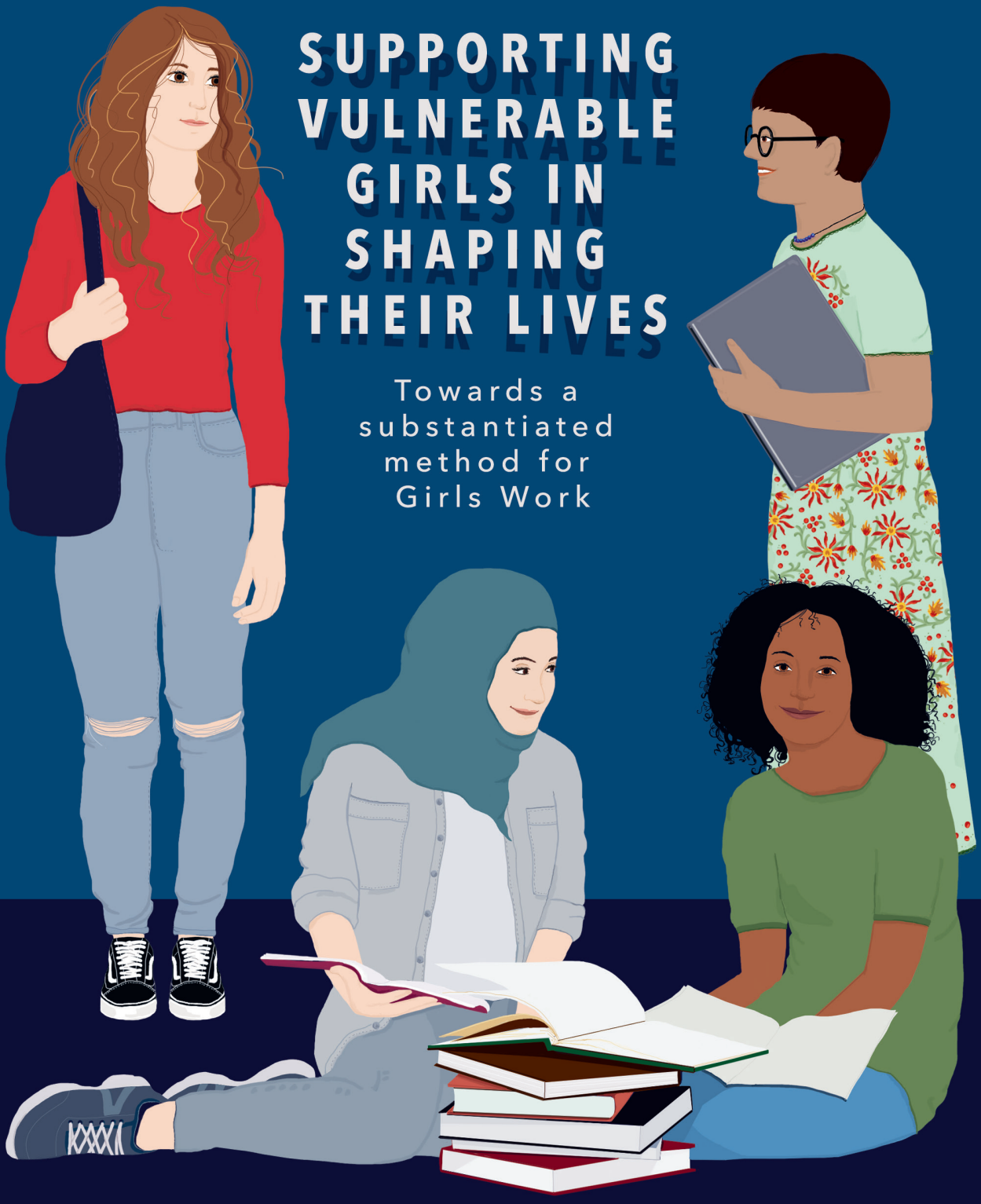
Towards a substantiated method for Girls Work



Cynthia Boomkens

SUPPORTING VULNERABLE GIRLS IN SHAPING THEIR LIVES

Towards a substantiated method for Girls Work

Cynthia Boomkens

The research described in this thesis was performed at department Tranzo, Scientific Centre for Care and Welfare, Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Tilburg University, Tilburg, the Netherlands

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Contents

Chapter **1**

General introduction

INTRODUCTION

Dunya (15 years old) will graduate from high school this year and has to decide what to do next. Dunya's friends tell her that it is important for girls to continue with higher education, so that they can have a career and become financially independent. At school, Dunya enjoys subjects like mathematics and economics, but her parents say that this does not offer girls a future career. They prefer that Dunya chooses an education that is "more suitable for a girl" and which will prepare her for motherhood. Dunya doesn't quite know what she wants or finds important. She is afraid that by choosing a different education, she will disappoint her parents. But on the other hand, she does not see her future as only a mother, and is it not better to find a career you really like?

Girls between 10 and 23 years old are in a phase in life in which they are occupied with the process of becoming adults (Brinkgreve & De Regt, 1991; Duits & De Bruyckere, 2013). The process of becoming an adult is associated with shaping, or learning to shape, one's life. During this period, girls develop an (adult) identity, which implies they are searching for answers to questions as "who am I?", "what are my talents?", "what do I want out of life" and "what do I find important?" (Bradfort, 2012; Metz, 2013). The above case shows how difficult finding answers to these questions can be. For some girls, this process is more difficult than for others because of one or more forms of vulnerability (Abdallah, 2017; Metz, 2016). Examples of this vulnerability are: living in a stressful home situation or in poverty, are subject to abuse, are bullied or discriminated, have problems at school, or have a cognitive, mental, social or physical disability.

When looking at vulnerable youth (both boys and girls), Abdallah (2017) argues that they "both struggle with their possibilities, identities, expectations, the demands of society that privileges cognitive skills, and a social need to simply 'fit in'." (p. 149). Yet he also points out that when dealing with the expectations of the social context, there are subtle differences between boys and girls. For example, girls are more concerned about what their social context expects of them (Duits & De Bruyckere, 2013; Isaacs, 2002) and therefore, girls try to find a balance between what they want in their lives and what is expected from them by their social context (Borovoy & Ghodsee, 2012; Charrad, 2010; Samman & Santos, 2009; Tang & Anderson, 1999).

One difference between boys' and girls' vulnerability is that girls are more prone to internalized emotions (inward-looking emotions such as shame, fear, sadness or

depression) than externalized emotions (outward-directed emotions such as vandalism on the street, beating, scolding). Since internalized emotions are invisible to the outside world and people who experience a lot of internalized emotions withdraw into themselves, their problems are often discovered unnecessarily late (Meeus, 1993; Van Dorsselaer, Zeijl, van den Eeckhout, ter Bogt, & Vollebergh, 2007). When looking at the social-emotional level, friendships are important for young people. Friendships among girls however, are more intimate than friendships among boys (Duits & De Bruyckere, 2013; Nijhof & Engels, 2015). This suggest that girls experience more support, dependence and interpersonal involvement in their friendships. On the other hand, this also means that girls are more focused on the quality of these relationships and are more worried about how others see them (Duits & de Bruyckere, 2013). Also, there are often tensions within the own group of friends, such as exclusion, ignoring, gossiping or spreading rumors, telling secrets, making sarcastic comments or using certain body language to fend off other girls (Waldron, 2011; Remillard & Lamb, 2005). Given the intimate friendship of girls, these tensions hurt them more (Bokhorst, Sumter & Westenberg, 2010).

When it comes to sexuality, the social context of girls plays a different role than for boys. The social context is more restrictive with girls than with boys. For example, girls are more than boys discouraged from being sexually active (Nijhof & Engels, 2015; Vanwesenbeeck, 2011). In addition, girls (but also adult women) must deal with different perceptions of sexuality such as "the romantic ideal (prince charming), issues such as honor and virginity that play a role especially in the Islamic world, and the notion of commercial sexualization of women and girls and the unrealistic beauty ideal" (Vanwesenbeeck, 2011, p.232). In the process of growing up, girls are more sensitive to sexual stereotyping, which means that if a girl does not fit into this stereotyped image it can have negative consequences for their (sexual) identity, for example because they feel embarrassed or insecure about their body or feel guilty (Nijhof & Engels, 2015; Vanwesenbeeck, 2011).

In the process of becoming an adult, girls (more than boys) often coordinate their choices about their lives and behavior with their social context (Charrad, 2010; Samman & Santos, 2009). This means that girls take the rules, values, norms and customs of their social context into account (Borovoy & Ghodsee, 2012; Charrad, 2010; Isaacs, 2002; Samman & Santos, 2009; Tang & Anderson, 1999). Sometimes the expectations from different social contexts are contradictory, especially for girls with a low education level

or migration background (Isaacs, 2002). The influence of the environment can be both restrictive and stimulating to how girls shape their lives, since it presents girls with different possibilities (Isaacs, 2002).

Some girls face more vulnerable circumstances in the process of becoming an adult than other girls, because "they are on their own, the accumulation of problems is too large, or their social context is unable to provide the required support" (Metz, 2013, p. 7). These vulnerable circumstances encompass all the events, characteristics or circumstances that (could) lead to difficulties in the process of becoming an adult (Boomkens, Rauwerdink-Nijland, Van der Grient, Van Trijp, & Metz, 2018). These include having a negative self-image, living in social isolation, being discriminated against or being bullied, teenage pregnancy, financial problems, substance abuse, and so on. Most youth work providers offer these girls support through the Girls Work method.

Girls Work, a method of professional youth work

Girls Work is a method of professional youth work that aims to support girls between 10-23 years who are growing up in vulnerable circumstances with their identity development, as a vital element of shaping their own lives (De Boer & Metz, 2014). Youth work (not just in the Netherlands but across Europe) focuses on supporting young people in their development into adulthood (Cullen, 2013; Metz, 2011b). Youth workers do so by strengthening their participation in all domains of society (Cullen, 2013; Dunne, Ulicna, Murphy, & Golubeva, 2004; Haidinger, Kasper, Knecht, Kuchler, & Atzmüller, 2016; Metz, 2017). In some countries, such as the Netherlands, youth work concentrates on supporting young people living in vulnerable circumstances (Declaration 2nd European Youth Work Convention, 2015; Dunne et al., 2004; Metz, 2017). Although in most European countries, youth work does not sufficiently reach youth from migrant backgrounds (Dunne et al., 2004), youth work in the Netherlands appears to be relatively successful in this respect (De Meere & Stoutjesdijk, 2019).

In the current thesis, we focus specifically on *professional* youth work. Professional youth work is "carried out by paid workers who demonstrably master relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes obtained through a combination of formal education, peer learning and experience in working with young people" (Metz, 2017, p. 2). As in most other European countries, there is not one particular training for youth workers in the Netherlands, but broader (social work) education includes attention for youth work (Dunne et al., 2004). Since 2014, the Netherlands has a professional code of youth

work (De Groot & Hajer, 2014) that sets out how youth workers should exercise their profession (Metz & Sonneveld, 2018).

Youth work in the Netherland is positioned in the leisure time of young people (Dunne et al., 2014; Haidinger et al., 2016) and has its starting point in the world as experienced by young people in daily live (Metz, 2011a). Youth workers offer young people a safe place where they can be and explore themselves, by organizing activities and supporting young people with their needs (Metz, 2013). An open approach is characteristic of the professionalism of youth work, which means that the youth worker "does not follow a fixed step-by-step plan, but it has a goal-oriented, process-oriented, moral and dialogical character" (Donkers, as cited by Metz, 2016, p. 51).

Most youth work providers choose to offer a separate method within youth work focusing specifically on girls: Girls Work (De Meere & Stoutjesdijk, 2019). Girls Work focuses on a specific group: girls between 10-23 years who are growing up in vulnerable circumstances. These girls receive support in their identity development, so that they are better able to shape their own lives themselves (De Boer & Metz, 2014). Girls Work is carried out at various youth work providers in large cities, medium-sized municipalities and villages in the Netherlands. Although Girls Work offers girls a separate space for girls, this does not mean that girls only participate in gender-specific youth work. A group of girls participate in both mixed youth work and Girls Work.

Girls Work comprises three different approaches: the group approach, the individual approach (Van der Grient & Metz, 2018) and a combination of the two. The group approach usually involves working with a fairly fixed group of girls who meet each other at a certain time. The frequency with which groups meet varies from once a month to a few times a week. Although the size of the groups varies, they usually consist of 8 to 12 girls. Youth workers can also offer individual support in which the youth worker works one-on-one with a girl on what that girl needs. The youth worker, in consultation with the management of the organization, chooses one approach or a combination of the approaches, "depending on the needs of the girls, the context, the organization and the mission of the municipality" (Van der Grient & Metz, 2018, p. 2).

Girls Work: A brief history

Girls Work has its origins in the beginning of the 20th century (Metz, 2011a). At the time, under the influence of various social developments in the Netherlands (such as

industrialization and urbanization) and new social laws (prohibiting child labor and introducing compulsory education; Van Dam, Kluft, & Scheffelaar, 2016), people came to realize that being a youth is a specific phase of life, between being a child and being an adult (Brinkgreve & De Regt, 1991; Metz, 2011a; Selten, 2005). Traditional institutions for young people were therefore no longer seen to offer appropriate living conditions. To prevent the alienation of young people, youth associations were created within the political and religious pillars in the Netherlands (Metz, 2011a; Selten, 2005). Against the background of these developments, the various pillars developed a leisure time offer for young people from the lower socio-economic classes combining relaxation, education and *"protecting them against deviation from religious life"* (Metz, 2011a, p. 13). Separate facilities for girls and boys were at that time a matter of course (Borsjes, Kroes, Noorda, & Veenbaas, 1985; Metz, 2011a). Girls and women were seen as complementary to men (hierarchically men stood above women) and therefore more traditional institutions – such as the educational system – were separated for boys and girls. The separate facilities for girls within these youth associations focused on training and preparing girls for their future task as a mother and wife within a family (Borsjes et al., 1985; Brinkgreve & De Regt, 1991; Metz, 2011a; Van Drenth & Te Poel, 1991).

Attention for young people increased after the First World War. In 1918, the Dutch government called for more resources for youth formation outside the family, church and school, where young people could work on their own identity development in safety (Metz, 2011a). The idea was that young people should be supported in developing 'mental' adulthood, which was understood as taking responsibility for shaping their own lives and being able to serve others and surrender to God (Van Drenth & Te Poel, 1991). This idea took hold as people increasingly felt that the educational system was not sufficient enough to prepare young people for adulthood. Also, preventive work in malfunctioning families was needed (Jansen et al in Metz, 2011a). The social pillars responded to this by developing programs and facilities for young people. However, these were not particularly successful in reaching young people from the lower socio-economic classes (Metz, 2011a). In response, new concepts were developed for boys which took the phase of being young and the associated lifeworld into account. With their more 'open youth work' –aimed at relaxation and meeting others – these programs did manage to reach youth from lower socio-economic classes. In 1927, the institution that created open youth work for boys created a separate facility for girls in Rotterdam (Metz, 2011a). The girls club was supposed to feel like a home for girls where they could share their stories and talk about their insecurities (Oudenaarden in Metz, 2011a). At the

same time, in Nijmegen, another girls club opened offering relaxation and education (especially sewing, cooking and home economics) (Metz, 2011a). After the Second World War, the concern about the well-being of young people resulted in a growing attention for youth work in the Netherlands. Because the 'wild' youth needed intensive support with the process of becoming an adult, the Dutch government financially invested more in youth work (Brinkgreve & De Regt, 1991; Metz, 2011a).

In the 1960s and 70s, major changes occurred in society (Metz, 2011a). The social pillars faded away, there was more attention for the self-development of individuals and emancipation, a growing resistance against the demands and expectations of the older generations, and also the role of young people within the family changed (Brinkgreve & De Regt, 1991). Young people were seen as the carriers of social innovation, and conflicts between generations occurred. During this period, youth work changed towards an offer that was more youth-led, instead of concentrating on educating young people and preparing them for adulthood (Metz, 2011a). This meant that youth work now organized gatherings for young people where they could meet each other and figure out what they wanted, without the interference of adults. Mainly young people from different subcultures of middle classes participated in youth work (such as squatters, gay youth, cannabis users and feminists). In the early 1960s, the separation between boys and girls was gradually abolished (Metz, 2011a). It was assumed that young people would rather participate in mixed youth work, because they were often found in places where the opposite sex were also present (Van Drenth & Te Poel, 1991). Another reason for offering youth work to both boys and girls was the assumption that boys and girls had to get used to each other during puberty and could thus practice desired manners between men and women (Van Drenth & Te Poel, 1991). Separate programs and facilities for girls decreased further over the years, and by the 1970s 'Girls Work' disappeared entirely (Van Drenth & Te Poel, 1991).

During the 1980s, the Netherlands suffered an economic crisis. Unemployment among young people and stricter educational requirements caused young people to remain in school longer and to postpone adulthood (Hazekamp & Van der Zande In Metz, 2011a). In the field of social work, a change occurred towards a more business-like approach (Van Dam et al., 2016), with social work focusing more on solving specific problems (De Haan & Duyvendak In Metz, 2011a). As a result, youth work started to focus more on specific target groups, such as working-class youth, addicted youth, migrant youth and girls (Metz, 2011a). The focus on girls as one of the target groups – not only in youth

work, but in the broader field of social work - was due to the second feminist wave, the increase in the number of female youth workers, and the under-representation of girls in youth work (Borsjes et al., 1985; Duits & De Bruyckere, 2013; Van Drenth & Te Poel, 1991; Metz, 2011a). Girls Work was back again. Under the influence of the second feminist wave, Girls Work began to focus on raising awareness of the position girls would have as adult women (Van Drenth & Te Poel, 1991). Youth workers expected girls to take a critical approach to men's subordination and to constantly increase their resilience (Borsjes et al., 1985). This would increase the possibility of an independent life now and in the future. However, soon a gap opened up between the 'feminist' youth workers and the girls. The female youth workers, who stood up for the position of girls, came from a different environment than the girls themselves; and not all the girls wanted to be associated with feminism (Van Drenth & Te Poel, 1991). Gradually, an awareness grew within Girls Work that girls should have the opportunity to emancipate in their own way (Borsjes et al., 1985).

In the 1990s, young people grew up with the idea that everything is possible, as long as you really want it (Metz, 2011a). However, this was not the case for all of them, since some young people lacked the skills to achieve what they desired, or they simply did not know what they wanted, and so on (Bradford, 2012; Metz, 2011a). This created inequality, since the mainstream belief was that however people end up, they owe it to themselves (Metz, 2011a). Also, youth policy changed towards providing opportunities and preventing drop-out, causing youth work to invest in the development of talents instead of relaxation and meeting others (Metz, 2011a). Therefore, youth work now focused more on the prevention of problems rather than on tackling problem behavior. Girls Work still focused on supporting girls in their process of becoming an adult and was based on principles such as independence and resilience (Van Drenth & Te Poel, 1991). More generally, Dutch society felt increasingly beset by the public nuisance caused by young people and juvenile crime (Metz, 2011a). Municipalities that had started to finance youth work had a growing attention for these 'boy problems' and how these could be tackled by youth work. Consequently, there was less attention and money for Girls Work (Gemmeke et al., 2011).

Since the turn of the millennium, there has been a focus on the professionalization of youth work (Dunne et al., 2014; Metz, 2011a). One reason for this is the change in policy in the broad field of social work which affects the contemporary policy on youth work (and therefore also in Girls Work). As a result, the policy on professional youth work

across Europe moved towards more evidence-based youth work (Dunne et al., 2014). Municipalities, who are now financially responsible for youth work, demanded insight into the effectiveness of youth work. Professionalization was also needed because youth work providers barely managed to attract new youth workers, due to the creation of broad social work education and the low appreciation for this field (graduated social professionals rather worked in related professions such as youth care, social welfare or sport) (Metz, 2011a). As a response, different organizations and institutions founded the *Landelijk Ontwikkelingsproject Jongerenwerk, Innovatie en Kwaliteitsverbetering* (LOJIK; the 'national development project for youth work, innovation and quality improvement'), which created a new education program for youth workers, conducted research on youth work, organized events in which youth workers could come together to exchange knowledge, and so on (De Winter, De Leuw, Klap, & Valkestijn, 2009). Through the LOJIK, a professional association was established in 2004 and in 2008 a competence profile for youth workers was created. Youth work nowadays consists of a broad offer of activities and support for young people in the process of becoming an adult in society (Metz, 2011a). It achieves the aims of the Child and Youth Act of 2015 (Sonneveld, Metz, & Manders, 2019) which focuses on increasing preventive support and promoting the use of social networks while decreasing the number of children in specialized care. Nowadays there is a growing attention for Girls Work as a separate program for girls within youth work.

A separate program for girls

There are different reasons for having a gender-specific approach nowadays. First, girls are underrepresented in mixed youth work activities. Already in 1985, Borsjes et al. argued that *"youth work is boys work."* Only 10-30% of the young people in mixed youth work are girls (Gemmeke et al., 2011). There are several reasons for this underrepresentation (Metz, 2011a; Valkesteijn, Bakker, Hilverdink, & Metz, 2015; Van Drent & Te Poel, 1991). The first reason is that activities which are offered in mixed youth work do not always appeal to girls. Second, parents and caregivers are more concerned about safety issues and therefore, they do not allow their daughters to participate in mixed youth work. For example, when mixed youth work is offered in an unfamiliar neighborhood or with the presence of (specific kinds of) boys, this could be a reason for them to not allow girls to participate. Also, boys tend to dominate the mixed youth work spaces because of their more extravert behavior. Therefore some girls feel uncomfortable and stay away from mixed youth work (Metz, 2011a). To reach

the girls who stay away from mixed youth work, youth work providers offer Girls Work (Gemmeke et al., 2011; Zuurmond, Geary, & Ross, 2012).

A second reason for offering gender-specific youth work involves the previously mentioned differences between boys and girls in the process of becoming an adult. Girls Work focuses more on the gender-specific vulnerabilities with which girls are confronted. According to Gemmeke et al. (2011), in Girls Work there is more attention for strengthening the self-image of girls, sexual awareness and resilience, compared with mixed youth work. Girls Work also has an emancipatory and feminist basis, which is mentioned internationally more explicitly than in the Netherlands. For example, Girls Work in Germany "aims to achieve equal rights and opportunities for girls in relation to boys" (Gemmeke et al., 2011, p. 25). In Austria Girls Work "is a youth work response to inequality and difference among young people stemming (not only) from the category gender" (Haidinger et al., 2006, p. 119). Batsleer (2013) suggests that Girls Work in the UK unites women to challenge "all patterns of dominance, including sexism, but not confined to it." (p. 23). In the Netherlands, Girls Work focuses more on supporting girls in their identity development, even when what girls want is against the principles of the youth worker (Borsjes et al., 1985). Girls need to emancipate in their own ways.

According to Dwyer et al. (2006) girls are very self-conscious about their appearance and how they come across to other people, especially when boys are present. Therefore, having a separate facility for girls within youth work creates a safe environment where they can discover who they are and what they find important in their lives without the presence of boys (Batsleer, 2013). In this safe environment, girls can develop self-confidence, new skills and meet without pressure from boys. Girls can also meet other girls, build up friendships, receive support, discuss sensitive topics and explore difficult questions.

TOWARDS A SUBSTANTIATED GIRLS WORK METHOD

As mentioned earlier, the policy on youth work has moved since the change of the millennium towards more evidence-based youth work (Dunne et al., 2014). This shift not only applies to youth work in the Netherlands, but to the wider field of social work in many other northern European countries (Van der Zwet, 2018). According to Van der Zwet, this shift is being urged by policymakers and for the Netherlands specifically, by the Dutch government, local authorities, and funding bodies. They demand more accountability and effectiveness of social work in general. Within youth work, funders

(mainly the municipalities) and society want to see the results of their investment, and therefore funding is currently being linked to outcomes of the activities (Dunne et al., 2014). This also applies for Girls Work as one of the methods of youth work.

Although Girls Work has a long tradition and many youth work providers offer this method, there is no research-based substantiation of the Girls Work method (Metz, 2016). Various interventions for working with girls have been described, usually consisting of a fixed step-by-step action. However, these interventions are not described specifically for Girls Work and they do not cover the approach of Girl Work (De Boer & Metz, 2014). Since there is no substantiated method for Girls Work, youth workers who work with girls are unable to demonstrate the outcomes or stress out the importance of working gender-specific (Metz, 2016). Therefore, three problems emerge. First, since funding is linked to the outcomes (Dunne et al., 2014) and there are no results of Girls Work available, funders may threaten to cut back on Girls Work (Boomkens et al., 2018). In some municipalities this even caused Girls Work to disappear. A second problem is that youth workers have difficulty describing and substantiating Girls Work and therefore managers, other youth workers and other social work professionals do not acknowledge the importance of Girls Work (Metz, 2016). This makes it harder for youth workers to collaborate with other professionals and sometimes they even struggle to maintain Girls Work within their own organization. Third, because of the absence of a substantiated method, individual youth workers need to find out for themselves how to act with girls, without any existing knowledge to rely on. Hence, by substantiating the Girls Work method, youth workers hope to contribute to the quality and professionalization of Girls Work and to gain more recognition for Girls Work (Metz, 2016).

What makes it difficult to substantiate the Girls Work method is the use of an open approach method within youth work (Metz, 2016). Using an open approach means that youth workers align their methodical actions to the situation, needs and possibilities of the people involved (Metz & Sonneveld, 2018). Therefore, what youth workers do in contact with the target group could be different for each girl, situation, context and/or for each approach (Boomkens et al., 2018). This open approach method makes it possible for youth workers to act more flexibly and dynamically but is also less predictable and more difficult to measure (Metz & Sonneveld, 2018). Existing methods to substantiate methods within social work often do not fit the open approach method of Girls Work. For example, the common factors model identifies factors which are

'common' in multiple approaches and are applicable for different target groups in Social Work and could be substantiated with research (De Vries, 2017). However, the factors identified are too general to describe and substantiate the open approach of Girls Work (Metz, 2016). To make it possible to substantiate the Girls Work method, Metz (2016) used Program Evaluation, which is "a social science activity directed at collecting analyzing, interpreting, and communicating information about the workings and effectiveness of social programs" (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004, p. 2). Central to Program Evaluation is the balance between scientific quality and the usefulness of the findings for practice. Metz (2016) used Program Evaluation to identify a method that could be used to substantiate the Girls Work method. As a result, she came up with the use of *methodic principles,* which are the guiding principles that give youth workers direction in their methodical actions in direct contact with the target group (Metz & Sonneveld, 2012). The methodic principles of youth work have three characteristics (Metz & Sonneveld, 2018). The first characteristic is that the methodic principles can occur in different youth work methods. However, within Girls Work, all the methodic principles do have a gender-specific approach (De Boer & Metz, 2014; Boomkens et al., 2018). The second characteristic is that methodic principles exist alongside each other, and which is deployed and when depends on the youth, the situation, the goals and the available resources (Metz & Sonneveld, 2012). The last characteristic of the methodic principles is that they differ in how they are expressed (Metz & Sonneveld, 2018).

In earlier research, De Boer and Metz (2012, 2014) identified the methodic principles which are specific for Girls Work through individual interviews and focus groups with youth workers. This resulted in the identification of nine methodic principles for Girls Work, which form the core of the methodic actions of youth workers (see Table 1). All the methodic principles have a more or less gender-specific approach. For example, safety is an important methodic principle in youth work in general, but this methodic principle plays a different role in Girls Work than in mixed youth work. For example, when parents are concerned about safety issues (such as the presence of boys who could have a bad influence on the girls or when Girls Work is located in a 'bad' neighborhood) girls are not allowed to participate in Girls Work (Carver, Timperio, Hesketh, & Crawford, 2010). Also, within Girls Work youth workers have more attention for the presence of 'relational aggression' such as gossiping, verbal aggression etc. Relational aggression is more present in groups of girls (Remillard & Lamb, 2005; Waldron, 2011) and it is therefore more important to focus on this aspect in Girls Work. This gender-specific approach applies to all the methodic principles.

Table 1
Description of the methodic principles (based on: Boomkens, Rauwerdink-Nijland, Van der Grient, Van Trijp & Metz, 2018)

Methodic principle	Description
Safety	Girls need to feel safe to be or to explore who they are in the Girls Work activity. Youth workers focus on both physical safety (it is safe for girls to go to the accommodation where Girls Work is located, there is a separate room for girls where boys cannot enter) and social safety (the youth worker has attention for tensions between girls, agrees with the girls on the rules of the activity, makes sure it is safe for girls to share stories and experiences).
Meaningful relationship	The relationship between the girl(s) and the youth worker should be important enough to make a difference in their lives. A meaningful relationship causes girls to trust the youth worker, to express herself and to take the input of the youth worker seriously.
Acquaintance	With this methodic principle, the youth worker discovers who girls really are. Youth workers come to understand the characteristics, insecurities, dreams, limitations, talents etc. of the girls.
Take into account the needs of girls	The youth worker seeks to meet the needs of every girl, the group as a whole, questions and circumstances. This methodic principle is about doing whatever fits the girl(s) needs at that specific moment. It can be about something that the girls specifically ask for, but also something that the youth worker signals. In that case it is about an unconscious or latent need of girls.
Positive motivation	Actively point out what girls have achieved. Instead of punishing girls for bad actions or things that went wrong, youth workers focus on what went well, what possibilities there are, and rewarding girls for the actions they take.
Boundaries	To make girls aware of generally accepted behavior and how their behavior affects others. This methodic principle also includes supporting girls to know their own boundaries and how to indicate them to others.
Expanding lifeworld	The youth worker exposes girls to experiences, social opportunities or chances which were unknown or unreachable to the girls. When girls encounter something new or experience something differently, they learn more from the society in which they grow up and how to use it.
Talk	Talking refers to the many and easy ways that girls talk. By using different conversation techniques, youth workers learn who the girls are and what goes on internally and in their lives, and youth workers or the group can offer support. Girls learn to express themselves and become aware of their development, situation, accepted behavior etc.
Use of social context	Youth workers collaborate with family, friends, networks, organizations and facilities outside of Girls Work. Youth workers involve the social context when they think that this social context can make a positive contribution to the girls' development. When the social context has a negative influence on the girls, youth workers can try to reduce this negative influence by working together with that social context.

AIM AND OUTLINE OF THIS THESIS

The identification of the methodic principles for Girls Work was the first step toward the substantiation of the Girls Work method (De Boer & Metz, 2014). However, what is currently known about the Girls Work method is only based on interviews and focus groups with youth workers. There is, as yet, no substantiation of the Girls Work method. The aim of the current thesis is therefore: to investigate whether and how the Girls Work method contributes to how girls shape their own life (see Table 2).

To substantiate the Girls Work method, we first wanted to understand its theoretical basis. Using theoretical models to substantiate a method could specify the aim of the method, illustrate its value, provide a basis for understanding the method, give insight into how youth workers (can) act according to the method, and establish a connection between policy and practice (Dunne et al., 2014; Van Yperen, Veerman, & Bijl, 2017). As a result, the theoretically substantiated method could increase the acknowledgment of Girls Work both inside and outside the field of professional youth work. Within Social Work theory, there are many theoretical concepts that resonate with the principal aim of Girls Work: to support girls between 10 and 23 years old with their identity development so that they are better able to shape their own lives on their way to adulthood (Batsleer, 2013; De Boer & Metz, 2014; Gemmeke et al., 2011; Van der Zande, 1991). Multiple theoretical concepts – such as autonomy, empowerment, resilience, agency - have been examined in previous research (see also Boomkens & Metz, 2015). In this previous study, the use of the theoretical concepts of agency and empowerment were favored above other concepts because they focus on the positive development of people, are more strengths-based, and consider individuals within their social context. However, how these two theoretical concepts can be applied to substantiate the Girls Work method is currently unclear. Therefore, the first aim of the current thesis is to understand the two theoretical concepts, how they relate to each other, and how they are applicable within Girls Work. In Chapter 2, both theoretical concepts are analyzed through conceptual analysis to understand their meaning, relationship to each other and how they can substantiate the Girls Work method. The concept of agency can be used to theoretically understand the aim of Girls Work, while empowerment offers a theoretical framework of how to build agency. By linking the aim and process of the Girls Work method to agency and empowerment (and their mutual relationship), youth workers are provided with a theoretical framework to support their goals.

Besides a theoretical substantiation, the current study also wants to provide an empirical substantiation of the Girls Work method. One reason for this is the aforementioned reason that the parties funding Girls Work (and Social Work in general) want to see the results of their investments. Youth workers also want this empirical substantiation to show the results and value of Girls Work to other professionals. This way, they hope to gain recognition for their work but also seek to improve the quality of the Girls Work method. To study this, we conducted a quantitative study in which 393 girls who participate in Girls Work filled out a questionnaire. As it is currently not known whether participation in Girls Work actually helps girls in their identity development and in shaping their own lives, Chapter 3 examines differences between factors such as the age of girls and how they participate in Girls Work (e.g. how long they participate in Girls Work, the intensity of participation and which Girls Work approach they make use of) and how it helps them to shape their lives.

Chapter 4 examines the presence of the methodic principles, as recognized by the girls. Methodic principles are the guiding principles that help youth workers determine their methodical actions (Metz & Sonneveld, 2012). What is characteristic about the methodic principles is that they are expressed in interaction with the girls. Therefore, girls should recognize these methodic principles in their contact with the youth workers. In this chapter we report on a quantitative method to investigate whether girls recognize these methodic principles in their Girls Work activity and whether any particular methodic principle is recognized more than others. Since the methodic principles describe how youth workers work within Girls Work, they should be present in different Girls Work approaches and with different kinds of girls. Therefore, we looked for differences in the perceived presence of the methodic principles among girls from different ages, cultural backgrounds and participation in Girls Work (how long girls participate in Girls Work and different Girls Work approaches).

In Chapter 5, we further substantiate the Girls Work method empirically. Based on the results from Chapter 2, we hypothesized that the theoretical concepts of agency and empowerment offer a theoretical framework for the Girls Work method. In this Chapter we test this hypothesis with empirical data. We also examine the role of the methodic principles in this framework, using serial mediation.

Last, we know that the social context plays an important role in how girls shape their lives (Isaacs, 2002), but it is unknown how this influences girls who participate in Girls

Work. Youth workers have therefore indicated that they need more knowledge about which social context influences girls and how they influence them in shaping their lives. With this knowledge, they could more actively collaborate or take into account the role of the social context of girls when helping girls to shape their lives. Chapter 6 presents the outcomes of a mixed-method study. The quantitative data show which social context influences girls and to what degree. The qualitative data show how different social contexts influence girls.

Based on the findings from Chapter 2 to 6, Chapter 7 presents the main findings of the current thesis. The main findings are summarized in a model which describes and substantiates how the Girls Work method contributes to the aim of Girls Work. We argue why this model substantiates the Girls Work method and consider recommendations regarding how the practice of Girls Work could use this model and future research. In this Chapter we also reflect on the strengths and limitations of the study as a whole.

Table 2
Overview of the goals and the Chapters of the current thesis

Goal	Chapter	Method
Introduction on Girls Work and the current thesis.	1. General introduction	-
Theoretical substantiation of the Girls Work method	2. Understanding the theoretical basis of the Girls Work Method: A Concept Analysis	Theoretical (concept analysis)
Empirical substantiation of the Girl Work method	3. The development of agency in professional youth work with girls and young women in the Netherlands. 4. How girls recognize the methodic actions of their youth workers in different Girls Work approaches. 5. The Girls Work Method: What is the Role of Empowerment in Building Girls' Agency?	Quantitative (cross-sectional)
Examination of the role of social contexts of girls	6. The Girls Work Method: The Role of Social Contexts in Developing Agency.	Mixed-method (quantitative: cross-sectional; qualitative: creative research instrument)
Overview of the main findings of the current thesis. Translation into a model for substantiating Girls Work method. Strengths and limitations of the study and recommendations.	7. General discussion	-

Chapter **2**

Understanding the theoretical basis of the Girls Work Method: A Concept Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

During the past two decades, there has been a shift in policy on social work practice towards more evidence-based practice (Van der Zwet, 2018). This shift is also noticed in professional youth work and it has fueled a debate on whether substantiation based on intuition, experience and education is still appropriate for professional youth work (Dunne, Ulicna, Murphy, & Golubeva, 2014). Therefore, there is a growing need for a theoretical and empirical substantiation. This also applies to Girls Work in the Netherlands, a method of professional youth work which focuses on supporting girls between 10 and 23 years old regarding their ability to shape their own lives (De Boer & Metz, 2012, 2014). A theoretical substantiation of the Girls Work method makes it more likely that the method is effective (Van Yperen, Veerman, & Bijl, 2017), and it increases the credibility and accountability of the method (Van der Zwet, 2018). It gives youth workers a better understanding of how Girls Work operates and gives them the opportunity to act more effectively in contact with the target group and to improve the quality and effectiveness of their professional activities. In the literature, there are two basic concepts that could theoretically explain the Girls Work method: agency and empowerment (Boomkens & Metz, 2015). In the current literature, there is a lot of debate about what these concepts entail and how they relate to each other. Therefore, in this article we focus on the theoretical analysis of both concepts and how the Girls Work practice could use them to substantiate the method. Before exploring the two theoretical concepts, we will first describe the Girls Work method in more detail.

Girls Work in the Netherlands is a method of professional youth work which aims to support girls between 10 and 23 years old with their identity development, so that they are better able to shape their own lives (Batsleer, 2013; De Boer & Metz, 2012, 2014; Gemmeke et al., 2011; Van der Zande, 1991). Girls Work focuses specifically on girls in vulnerable circumstances (e.g. girls who live in a stressful home situation or in poverty, are bullied or discriminated etc.; Abdallah, 2017). Because they face a double threshold (growing up and overcoming vulnerable circumstances), with limited availability of support in their own social networks, these girls need the support of professionals in shaping their own lives. In the Netherlands, youth workers have completed formal education and are in paid employment (Metz, 2017). Girls Work is positioned in the leisure time of girls (Dunne et al., 2014; Haidinger, Kasper, Knecht, Kuchler, & Atzmüller, 2016; Metz, 2011b), and offers girls a safe place to meet other girls, to participate in various kinds of activities, to find room to learn and explore new things, and also offers practical and emotional support (Metz, 2013). Youth workers connect to the girls' own

lifeworld, meaning that they are 'there' where the girls are (at the same places and connecting to the perspectives and needs of girls).

As mentioned above, the aim of Girls Work is to support girls between 10 and 23 years old with their identity development so that they are better able to shape their own lives on their way to adulthood (Batsleer, 2013; De Boer & Metz, 2014; Gemmeke et al., 2011; Van der Zande, 1991). This aim resonates with some of the grand theories that are widely used in Social Work theory (such as autonomy, empowerment, resilience, agency etc.). In a previous study, multiple theories have been examined (see also Boomkens & Metz, 2015), which have led to the use of both agency and empowerment to substantiate the Girls Work method. We used these concepts, because in comparison with other concepts, agency and empowerment are more development-oriented, they focus on the positive development of people, and are more strengths-based. Another reason to prefer agency and empowerment above for example autonomy is the focus on the environment of individuals. However, there is much debate about what these concepts entail, and how they relate to one another. Therefore, a conceptual analysis of the two concepts is needed. With a clear understanding of these concepts, we can elaborate on their application in Girls Work. In the results section of this article, we describe the definition of both concepts and how they relate to each other. In the discussion section we focus on how these concepts can be used to substantiate the Girls Work Method.

METHOD

Concept Analysis

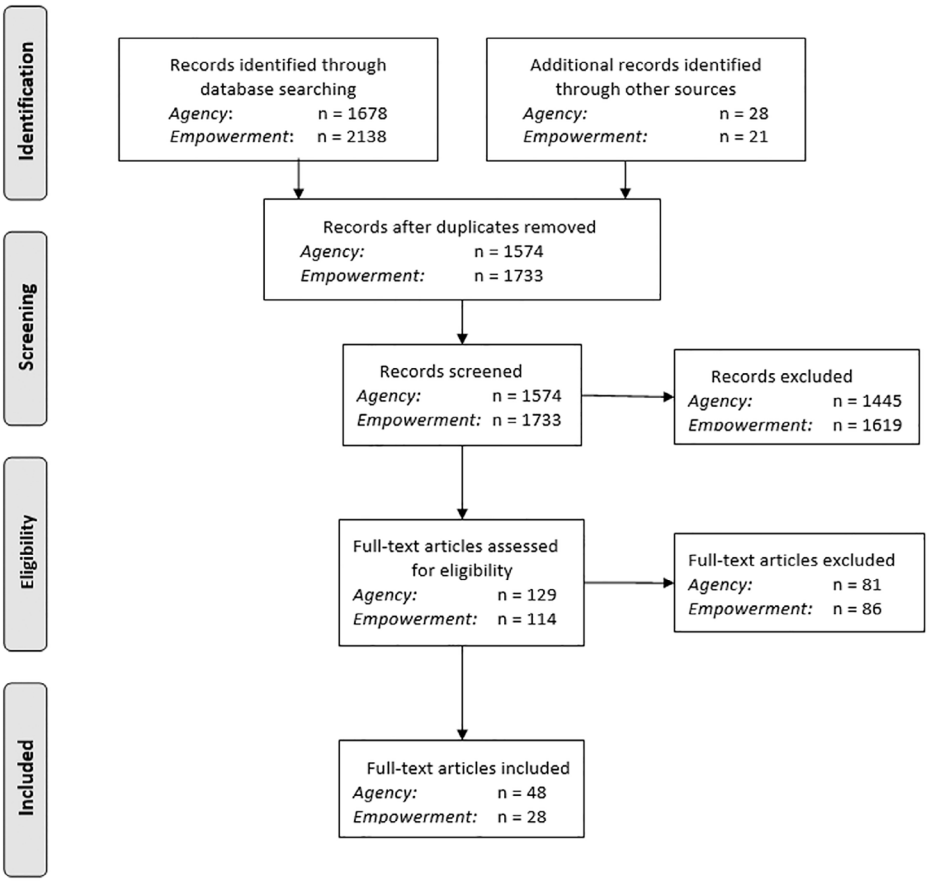
We used conceptual analyses to clarify the concepts of agency and empowerment, their characteristics and relation to other concepts. The purpose of this analysis (Nuopponen, 2010) was to clarify the meaning and relation of the concepts of agency and empowerment, as an essential step to developing a theoretical substantiation (Van Yperen et al., 2017) of the Girls Work method. Our analysis is based on the concept analysis method of Walker and Avant (as cited in Nuopponen, 2010) and a method described by Rodgers (as cited in Ramsay & Boddy, 2016).

Data sources

We searched for peer-reviewed papers in three databases (Web of Science, PsychInfo, ScienceDirect), using the following keywords for agency: agency AND youth work, Personal Agency, Human Agency. For empowerment, we used the keywords: psychological empowerment, individual empowerment, empowerment AND youth work

OR girls OR youth. This search was combined with a secondary search (e.g. 'snowballing', asking colleagues or previously found papers in other parts of the study). Only articles

Figure 1
The search process using the PRISMA flow diagram (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, Altman, The PRISMA Group, 2009).



in written in English or Dutch were included. This resulted in a total of 1706 articles for agency and 2159 articles for empowerment (see also Figure 1). After deleting the duplicates, a total of 1574 articles for agency and 1733 articles for empowerment remained. These articles were all screened based on the title or when still in doubt, also based on the abstract. Exclusion criteria were: different field of study (e.g. education, management, law, technology, etc.), the concept is not a central theme in the article

or based on a too specific target group. Since the aim of this article is to substantiate the Girls Work method, we searched for articles that focus on youth, women or vulnerable people. The full-text of these articles were assessed, and were excluded when: (1) Articles could not be located with available resources, (2) the concept does aligns with our conceptualization, (3) the article is based on an specific situation / target group and (4) the article lacks operationalization or only refers to other articles for their operationalization of the concept. This led to the inclusion of 48 articles for agency and 28 articles for empowerment. The full-texts which were included were read and summarized in tables with the following headings: definition of the concept, components of the concept, relation with other concepts, other. Appendix A shows an overview of the definitions of both concepts.

RESULTS

Agency

Although *agency* is an important theoretical concept in social work research (Hutchinson, 2005; Parsell, Eggings, & Marston, 2017) – especially in research involving deprived people (Borovoy & Ghodsee, 2012; Charrad, 2010; McMunn, Bartley, & Kuh, 2006; Pollack, 2008; Samman & Santos, 2009; Tang & Anderson, 1999) – researchers use different interpretations of the concept (see also Appendix A). In its most basic definition, agency can be seen as people's ability to act (Campbell, 2009; Charrad, 2010; Gillepsie, 2012; Han, Nicholas, Aimer, & Gray, 2015; Philips, 2013). Others add to the definition that people act on behalf of what matters to them (Alkire, 2005; Dryduk, 2013). Another frequent definition is people's ability to intentionally do things or to make purposeful choices regarding their lives (Bandura, 2001; Chirkov, 2011; Goldberg & Crespo, 2003; Maynard & Stuart, 2018; Meesters, 2018; Paternoster & Pogarsky, 2009; Samman & Santos, 2009). Other definitions include the power of individuals to influence their own life course (Elder, 1998; Hutchinson, 2005; Kögler, 2012; Luthra, 2016; Pollack, 2008; Stuart, 2014; Swartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005).

What emerges in all interpretations of agency is that people have the ability to make decisions about their own lives. In this sense, agency refers to the human capacity to consciously influence their own lives (Bandura, 2006), which means the capacity for self-management, where individuals make choices about their lives and actually act upon these choices. These choices are made by the individual, influenced by "the interplay of intrapersonal, behavioral and environmental factors" (Bandura, 2006, p. 165). Therefore, agency is not only concerned with a person's individual goals but also

considers rules, social values, norms, and the customs of family, culture and society (Charrad, 2010; Elder, 1998; Evans, 2007; Hitlin & Elder, 2007; Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2018; Madhok, 2013; Meesters, 2018; Sewel, 1992; Williams, 1994). This is also known as the agency-structure debate (Duits, 2008), which focuses on whether and how people's social contexts influence their agency. In short, when shaping one's own life, people are influenced by different social contexts (Bandura, 2006; Frie, 2005; Hutchinson, 2005; Martin & Gillespie, 2010; Parsell, Tomaszewski, & Phillips, 2014; Swann & Jetten, 2017).

However, this does not mean that people simply follow what their social context demands of them. As Bandura (2006) describes it: "*People are contributors to their life circumstances, not just products of them.*" (p. 164). Some researchers state that especially the agency of females is "compromised" (Isaacs, 2002, p. 133), which indicates that women make compromises between what is important to her and what is important for the social context. As Charrad (2010) puts it: "women use their agency within the limits of existing rules and resources" (p. 519). Not only are people influenced by their environment, but they also need (the cooperation of) their environment to bring about change in their lives (Callero, 1994; Dryduk, 2013; Frie, 2005; Martin & Gillespie, 2010; Sewel, 1992). According to Isaacs (2002), especially for women who are oppressed, these environments create opportunities to change their lives because people need others to achieve (common) goals. In conclusion, agency can best be described as people's ability to shape their own lives, in relation to their own values and in alignment with their own social context.

Within the definition of agency according to Bandura (2006), agency consists of four core properties. Although other researchers do not explicitly mention this differentiation, the properties that Bandura distinguishes are reflected in other articles. Although the four core properties of agency appear to be chronological, they can also take place side by side. The first property is *intentionality* and refers to people's intentions to act (Bandura, 2006; Chirkov, 2011; Maynard & Stuart, 2018; McMunn et al., 2006; Sewel, 1992). Intentions can be seen as a sense of a desired outcome (Maynard & Stuart, 2018), making purposeful choices (Samman & Santos, 2009) and are inspired by thoughtful consideration (Paternoster & Pogarsky, 2009). Because people set intentions for themselves, they commit themselves to fulfill them (Bandura, 2001). Borovoy and Ghodsee (2012) do not speak about intentionality, but about the freedom of women to choose what they want. The second property - *forethought* – refers to thinking about the outcomes of their intentions (Bandura, 2006). According to Hitlin and Elder

(2007) and Maynard and Stuart (2018), this also consists of making plans about how to achieve intentions. By thinking ahead, people can be motivated or demotivated to make certain choices (Bandura, 2006). Also, knowledge about the consequences of one's intentions can improve the "probability of performing a desired action in the future" (Martiny-Huenger, Martiny, Parks-Stamm, Pfeiffer, & Gollwitzer, 2017, p. 1514). Borovoy and Ghodsee (2012) emphasize that especially women take into account the consequences of their actions. Within the third property - *self-reactiveness* – the intentions are converted into actions (Bandura, 2006). As other researchers also point out, agency is not only concerned with the intention to act, but also with actual action (Charrad, 2010; Maynard & Stuart, 2018; Donald, Koolwal, Annan, Falb, & Goldstein, 2016; McMunn et al., 2006; Pollack, 2008; Sewel, 1992; Tang & Anderson, 1999; Titma, Tuma, & Roots, 2007). These actions are taken "within opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances" (Elder, 1998, p. 4). Within the fourth property - *self-reflection* - people will reflect on their thoughts and actions (Bandura, 2006). By doing this, people can develop a clear understanding of themselves and the world around them (Tang & Anderson, 1999).

Empowerment

Empowerment is a popular concept that is applied in the social work practice with various domains, target groups, disciplines and in organizations and projects (Albuquerque, Santos, & Almeida, 2017; Rodrigues, Menezes, & Ferreira, 2017; Van Regenmortel, 2002). As a result, the concept is not well defined, and is even defined differently (Bay-Cheng, Lewis, Steward, & Malley, 2006; Catteno & Chapman, 2010; Martinez, Jiménez-Morales, Masó, & Bernet, 2017; Rogers, Chamberlin, Ekkison, & Crean, 1997; Wagaman, 2011; see also Appendix A). What emerges from the different definitions of empowerment is the focus on the process by which people influence their own life (e.g. Alkire, 2005; Bay-Cheng et al., 2006; Bolton & Brookings, 1998; Catteno & Chapman, 2010; Gullan, Power, & Leff, 2013; Gutièrez, 1995; Hébert, Lanctôt, & Turcotte, 2016; Martinez et al., 2017; Maynard & Stuart, 2018; McLean, 1995; Rappaport, 1987; Van Regenmortel, 2011; Wagaman, 2011). A commonly used definition of empowerment is offered by Rappaport (1987), who defines empowerment as "a process, a mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs" (p. 122). In this definition, empowerment refers to the process of self-reinforcement by which people (among others) become (more) owners of their own lives. Self-reinforcement means that ownership must be acquired by the individual personally, suggesting that

empowerment cannot be given to someone (Wong, Zimmerman, & Parker, 2010). This definition is also used in this article.

Empowerment occurs at multiple levels (individual, organization and community), where all levels are related to each other (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006; Rappaport, 1987; Rodriquez et al., 2017; Zimmerman, 1995). However, the majority of the studies on empowerment focus on the individual level (Bolton & Brookings, 1998; Christens, Peterson, & Speer, 2011), which was proposed by Zimmerman (1995) as *Psychological Empowerment*. However, this focus on the individual does not mean that other contexts are overlooked (Christens et al., 2011; Zimmerman, 1995). Because of the ecological nature of psychological empowerment (Rappaport, 1987), individuals will influence and are influenced by empowerment at other levels (organizational and community levels).

Psychological empowerment consists of three components: intrapersonal, interactional and behavioral components (Zimmerman, 1995). The *intrapersonal component* refers to how people think about themselves in relation to others (Eisman et al., 2016; Zimmerman, 1995). It consists of the belief in one's own ability to influence their life (self-efficacy), the motivation to exercise control over their life, and the perception of personal control, or the "locus of control" (Delahaij, 2004; Zimmerman, 1995). The locus of control could be internal (when someone senses that their behavior may influence the events in their lives) or external (when individuals believe that their own behavior has no influence on the events) (Delahaij, 2004).

The *interactional component* refers to an understanding of the social and material resources which are needed to influence one's own life (Eisman et al., 2016; Delahaij, 2004; Zimmerman, 1995). Central within the interactional component is learning to understand the context, to develop an awareness of the options and possibilities in the social context to achieve goals, and to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills needed to achieve goals (Delahaij 2004; Zimmerman, 1995). Zimmerman (1995) refers to this as the development of a critical awareness.

The *behavioral component* refers to the actual actions taken by people to gain more control over their own lives (Zimmerman, 1995). Participation is the core principle here (Delahaij, 2004). Through participation, people (a) can directly influence the environment, (b) learn new skills, (c) enlarge the social context and (d) strengthen the

sense of personal control (Zimmerman, 1995). The three components of personal empowerment are distinct, but all three components are needed to measure psychological empowerment as a whole (Boomkens, Metz, Schalk, & Van Regenmortel, 2019a; Eisman et al., 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2017; Steenssens, Van Regenmortel, & Schalk, 2017; Zimmerman, 1995).

Christens (2012) suggested a fourth component of personal empowerment: relational empowerment, which he describes as "interpersonal transactions and processes that undergird the effective exercise of transformative power in the sociopolitical domain." (p. 121). In our opinion, this component is incorporated in the other three components as suggested by Zimmerman (1995). Zimmerman argued in his article that within psychological empowerment, the sociopolitical or contextual factors are included. Therefore, we choose to only use the three components suggested by Zimmerman (1995).

How are agency and empowerment related?

The previous section described the two concepts of agency and empowerment separately. Just as with the concepts itself, there are different views about whether (and how) these two concepts are related. For example, some researchers think of agency as a part of empowerment (e.g. Catteno & Champman, 2010; Hébert et al., 2016; Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007). Others state that agency influences empowerment (e.g. Mishra, 2014; Wong et al., 2010) or that empowerment influences agency (e.g. Maynard & Stuart, 2018). The different views can be explained by the different definitions of both agency and empowerment. For example, when viewing agency as 'self-efficacy' (see section above), it makes sense to treat 'agency' as a part of empowerment (i.e. self-efficacy is indeed part of the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment). The same applies to definitions of empowerment. When empowerment is defined as a result, it overlaps with the definition of agency. This explains the different views on the relationship between agency and empowerment. However, when agency and empowerment are defined as described above, we argue that empowerment is the process which levers agency. Maynard and Stuart (2018) confirm this.

The understanding of agency as the result and empowerment as the process has been described previously, although researchers do not always use these concepts explicitly. For example, Donald et al. (2016) state that to become an agent, "individuals need to perceive a sense of control" (p. 6) and that people's agency is influenced by the "resources available to the individual and how the individual interacts with them"

(p. 6). This interacts with both the intrapersonal and interactional component of empowerment. Also, several researchers state that participation is necessary to achieve agency (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; Christens et al., 2011; Lyons, Smuts, & Stephens, 2001; Prestby, Wandersman, Florin, Rich, & Chavis, 1990; Rich, Edelstein, Hallman, & Wandersman, 1995; Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, & Checkoway, 1992). This is also part of the empowerment theory, as the behavioral component.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From the perspective of Girls Work, the question is how the concepts of agency and empowerment and their relationship with each other can contribute to the substantiation of the Girls Work method. Therefore, we first examined the aim of Girls Work, which is described as supporting girls in their identity development, so that they, as adults, can shape their lives as part of society (Batsleer, 2013; Gemmeke et al., 2011; De Boer & Metz, 2012, 2014; Van der Zande, 1991). The focus of this aim is on supporting girls to shape their own lives, which is also central to the concept of agency. It seems that the concept of agency can explain to youth workers what shaping one's own life entails. Bandura (2006) offers a clear overview of what agency entails and the core properties of agency. Bandura's properties of agency in particular offer a framework for Girls Work that youth workers could use to focus more specifically on supporting girls to shape their own lives, by focusing on all four properties of agency: to set intentions for their future (intentionality), to set realistic goals and anticipate on likely outcomes (forethought), to act upon these intentions (self-reactiveness), and to reflect upon their thoughts and actions (self-reflection). By dividing the aim of Girls Work into four properties, youth workers could act specifically on those properties which girls have the most difficulty with. Therefore, we argue that agency could theoretically understand the aim of Girls Work.

The conceptual analysis shows that agency and empowerment are related to each other, and that empowerment can theoretically be seen as the process of developing agency. Both concepts are therefore needed to establish the theoretical basis of Girls Work, but the two concepts each have a different function. Agency offers the Girls Work practice a framework to theoretically understand the aim of Girls Work, while empowerment offers a theoretically framework of how to build agency. More specifically, we argue that when youth workers want to support girls in their ability to shape their own lives, they should focus on the empowerment of girls.

The conceptual analysis shows that empowerment is a multi-level concept. Within Girls Work in the Netherlands, youth workers focus mainly on the individuals, but also consider their relational contexts. Therefore, we choose to apply the process of psychological empowerment in our theoretical underpinning of the Girls Work method. Empowerment consists of three components: intrapersonal component, interactional component and behavioral component (Zimmerman, 1995). When translating these components into Girls Work, we argue that youth workers focus on the individual girl (to make her believe in her own ability to influence her life and to motivate her), on helping girls to understand their context (to give girls an understanding of their social and material resources) and on supporting girls in their participation in different social contexts (to influence that social context, to learn new skills, to increase their social network and to strengthen their sense of personal control).

By linking the aim and process of the Girls Work method to agency and empowerment (and their relationship), it offers youth workers a theoretical framework of how to act to achieve their goals. It gives direction to their actions and an explanation of what the aim of Girls Work entails and the layering of the aim. With this, it becomes clearer to youth workers what they should focus on (on what property of agency). Also, it points out that the process of achieving this is also layered and it offers youth workers insight into the aspects of their actions and what they should focus on. Another benefit of this substantiation is that youth workers can understand and explain the process of achieving the aim of Girls Work. Youth workers used to find it difficult to explain their work and as a consequence their work is often not recognized or understood by other professionals, municipalities or stakeholders. With this, youth work providers are one step closer towards a better substantiated method.

The concepts of agency and empowerment seem useful for substantiating the Girls Work method theoretically. However, these concepts are used within the broad field of social work (and even other fields). It is therefore plausible that the definitions of both concepts and how they relate to each other can be used in other social work contexts. The choices we made in using specific definitions and how these concepts relate to each other were made specifically with a view to the Girls Work method. Therefore, we cannot make any firm statements about the way these concepts are used in other social work contexts. Further research on how these two concepts relate to each other in other social work practices is recommended.

Appendix A. Overview definitions and conceptual framework

Agency	Definitions / conceptual framework
Alkire, 2005	People ability to act on behalf what matters to them.
Bandura, 1999	People operate as thinkers of the thoughts that serve determinative functions. They construct thoughts about future courses of action to suit ever-changing situations, assess their likely functional value, organize and deploy strategically the selected options, evaluate the adequacy of their thinking based on the effects which their actions produce and make whatever changes may be necessary.
Bandura, 2001	To be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one's actions.
Bandura, 2006	Their advanced symbolizing capacity enabled humans to transcend the dictates of their immediate environment and made them unique in their power to shape their life circumstances and the course of their lives. … To be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances. …They are contributors to their life circumstances, not just products of them.
Campbell, 2009	On the one hand, agency can simply refer to the power possessed by individuals that enables them to engage in actions, while on the other it can refer to the fact that individuals may themselves, on occasions, act as agents.
Charrad, 2010	In its most basic definition, agency is the capacity to act. In sociological terms, the capacity to act, however, can only be understood within the context of specific social structures in given time and places ranging from stated, social institutions, groups, culture, or norms to name only a few.
Chrikov, 2011	A conventional definition of agency is the ability to act with an intention to produce a particular result.
Dryduk, 2013	Agency refers to a state of affairs…Agency is conceived in terms of achieving goals that people happen to value, rather than functioning in ways that they have reason to value. …Agency, as we are now considering it, is a concept of autonomous personal involvement in activities; it is not about the consequences of those activities on a person's life.
Elder, 1998	… the principle of human agency states that individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances.
Evans, 2007	The empirically grounded concept of bounded agency developed here sees the actors as having a past and imagined future possibilities, which guide and shape actions in the present, together with subjective perceptions of the structures they have to negotiate, the social landscapes that affect how they act. Bounded agency is socially situated agency, influenced but not determined by environments and emphasizing internalized frames of reference as well as external actions.

Agency	Definitions / conceptual framework
Gillepsie, 2012	Human agency can be defined as the degree to which an agent can act independently of the immediate situation. This sociocultural definition, which stems from Dewey and Mead, emphasises not only the power to act, but the degree to which an action is motivated by concerns originating outside of the immediate situation. The immediate situation is the here-and-now perceptual and experiential situation which arises as a function of the agent's immediate impulses combined with situatable affordances, demands and constraints.
Goldberg & Crespo, 2003	An individual's sense of freedom of choice of behavior is based on the recognition that we seem to be able in at least some aspects of life to have some control over our behavior. This capacity is called personal agency.
Han et al., 2015	the capacity of a constituency to act on their own health – in other words, by developing their individual and collective agency.
Hitlin & Elder, 2007	Agency represents a human capacity to influence one's own life within socially structured opportunities.
Hutchinson, 2005	The emphasis on human agency, or the use of personal power to achieve one's goals…
Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2018	…'active agency' refers partly to the dynamic complex of persons' self-reflection, evaluation of their own experience and observation of the world around them. These aspects of active agency include their internal dialogues, critical awareness of possibilities for change in the world around them, planning, decision-making, choice, discussion and interaction with others. Active agency refers also to the practical steps – action – that a person takes to achieve some particular aim or outcome, single-handedly or together with others. We assume that active agency is responsive to, but not simply determined by or dependent on, contextual, social and environmental processes, whether directly experienced or mediated in one way or other.
Isaacs, 2002	I am going to understand feminist agency as women's ability to be effective agents against their own oppression.
Kögler, 2012	First, a subject with agency has to have the capacity to affect real change in the world… Second, we require the capacity of a subject to understand its own effects vis-à-vis the world. …However, the concept of human agency requires that acts are knowingly caused, i.e. that humans know that they are the cause of effects…Third, the concept of agency furthermore entails that the agent is capable of differentiating between his or her own causal powers, i.e. the particular acts and intentions that are undertaken to make a difference in the world, and those conditions and contexts that independently of the self-affect change, including those that have affected the constitution of the self's intentional powers as such.
Luthra, 2016	It is common to conceive of human agency as consisting in the rational control we exert over our doings. According to this view, we are active agents, and in control of our doings, through exercises of our rational capacities for thought, understanding, and volition.

Agency	Definitions / conceptual framework
Madhok, 2013	I am against limiting understandings of agency to the ability to act (freely or unfreely) according to one's freely chosen desires and in favor of an alternative agency/autonomy perspective .... Instead, I argue that we must shift our theoretical gaze away from these overt actions to an analysis of critical reflections, motivations, desires, and aspects of our ethical activity... Such a conceptual shift in our thinking of agency would pay attention to the sociality of persons and to the particularities of social and historical circumstances in which persons fulfil their moral obligations and pursue life plans and choices; it would display a certain content neutrality in respect of our preferences; and finally, it would be predicated upon a non-insistence on maximal or free action.
Madhok et al., 2013	When it comes to the relationship between agency and choice, the individual is specifically looked at, the ability to reflect on himself and his / her choices and the ability to respond to their own projects. These choices must come from the person himself and not be pressured. However, when we look at the relationship between agency and coercion we see that there are restrictions when someone wants to exercise their agency. Agency is therefore not an individualistic fact, it is a collective transformation. Agency is also about the decision not to condemn anyone. It refuses paternalism in which others determine what is good for someone and that others have no ability to choose for themselves.
Maynard & Stuart, 2018	The ability to act. Agency refers to the awareness, choices and actions of individuals. Agency is about intentionally doing things, rather than allowing life to happen to you.
Meesters, 2018	Agency... refereert aan de mogelijkheid van een individu om keuzes te maken en autonoom te handelen in een systeem van normen en waarden te midden van een omgeving die deze agency bevordert. Dit laatste is van cruciaal belang omdat omgevingsfactoren de vorming van agency in principe ook zouden kunnen belemmeren
Parsell et al., 2017	Emirbayer and Mische (1998) recognizes that people do not only act out of habit and routine, rather agency is oriented towards future possibilities and an individual's capacity to reflect upon and evaluate their present situation. Adopting Emirbayer and Mische's model, we add to it with Hitlin and Johnson (2015) to integrate aspirations and optimism in achieving life goals as meaningful components of human agency.
Parsell et al., 2014	we see agency as a conceptual lens through which we can critically demonstrate the role that people play in reflecting on and explaining their pasts, and determining and shaping the conditions of their future outcomes....Our framework of agency is attuned to how actors critically evaluate and reconstruct the conditions of their own lives.

Agency	Definitions / conceptual framework
Paternoster & Pogarsky, 2009	In other words, persons acting with human agency make choices and enforce these choices on the world. They do not, therefore simply respond to the roles and institutions they are involved in, but create those roles and institutions, thereby enforcing their will.... human agency is revealed at least in part through thoughtful reflection and deliberative action. Agency is not to us "will" or personal freedom, nor is it merely human volition. It is an intentional activity directed toward some goal.
Pollack, 2008	The notion of agency has come to refer to an internal or psychological quality from which a woman derives a sense or feeling that she can function as an autonomous, self-determining individual. It is self-esteem that provides her with this feeling.
Philips, 2013	Agency, in the sense of a capacity to act and reflect...
Samman & Santos, 2009	Agency is an actor's or group's ability to make purposeful choices.
Sewel, 1992	Agency ... is the actor's capacity to reinterpret and mobilize an array of resources in terms of cultural schemas other than those that initially constituted the array. ...To be an agent means to be capable of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree.
Smith et al., 2000	There are two types of agency: personal agency, or achieving desired outcomes on one's own behalf (e.g., through ability, choices, perseverance, or planning) interpersonal agency, or obtaining positive ends through interactions with others (e.g., by expressing needs or behaving cooperatively)
Stuart, 2014	Agency refers to the awareness, choices and actions of an individual striving for what they need in the world.
Swann & Jetten, 2017	agency—the capacity and intention to control their own behavior and outcomes (Bandura, 2006)—by assessing the situation and determining how best to reach their goals while remaining faithful to their beliefs and dispositions.
Swartz et al., 2005	[Agency] is used here to refer to a sense of responsibility for one's life course, the belief that one is in control of one's decisions and is responsible for their outcomes, and the confidence that one will be able to overcome obstacles that impede one's progress along one's chosen life course.
Tang & Anderson, 1999	Agency offers hope for the alleviation of oppression through transforming the structural constraints imposed in people's lives.
Williams, 1994	The alternative understanding involves giving up the definition of agency as making (free) choices from among alternatives. Rather, I suggest, agency must be understood as living truthfully, or "having the world" truthfully. ....What this means is that truth is found not in correspondence to absolutes that have a metaphysical existence apart from the world of human activity, but rather, in a way of being situated within that world.

Empowerment	Definitions / conceptual framework
Alkire, 2005	Empowerment means enhancing the capacity of poor people to influence the state institutions that affect their lives, by strengthening their participation in political processes and local decision-making. And it means removing the barriers - political, legal, and social - that work against particular groups and building the assets of poor people to enable them to engage effectively in markets.
Alsop, Bertelsen, & Holland, 2006.	The process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.
Bay-Cheng et al., 2006	At a general level, empowerment is conceptualized as gaining mastery or control over a task, challenge, or circumstance. Beyond this most basic definition, however, there is considerable debate over the possible meanings, purposes, forms, and consequences of empowerment.
Boehm & Staples, 2002	Empowerment refers to processes and outcomes whereby less powerful individuals and groups move to reduce discrepancies in power relationships either through zero-sum, win-lose strategies or mutual benefit, win-win approaches…A process includes the experiences and activities through which individuals gain power, whereas outcomes are defined as end products whereby a measure of power is achieved.
Bolton & Brookings, 1998	Empowerment refers generally to the capacity of disenfranchised people to understand and become active participants in matters that affect their lives.
Catteno & Chapman, 2010	We define empowerment as an iterative process in which a person who lacks power sets a personally meaningful goal oriented toward increasing power, takes action toward that goal, and observes and reflects on the impact of this action, drawing on his or her evolving self-efficacy, knowledge, and competence related to the goal…The process of empowerment is fundamentally about gaining power…The successful outcome of the process of empowerment is a personally meaningful increase in power that a person obtains through his or her own efforts.
Christens, 2012	Empowerment proposes the promotion of wellbeing and citizen control at the psychological, organizational and community levels, particularly for marginalized populations.
Gullan et al., 2013	Popular views of empowerment often limit the concept to an individual's feelings of influence and control, equating empowerment with constructs such as self-efficacy and esteem. Theories of psychological empowerment go beyond self-perceived strength to also include knowledge, skills, and behavior.

Empowerment	Definitions / conceptual framework
Gutièrrez, 1995	Empowerment is the process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals, families, and communities can take action to improve their situations.
Hébert et al., 2016	Empowerment is a process that leads individuals or groups to resist manipulation, to create new opportunities for themselves, and to achieve greater self-respect and self-acceptance. The aim of empowerment is to give disadvantaged individuals and groups the ability to participate in, negotiate with, and influence the institutions that affect their lives.
Jennings et al., 2006.	Empowerment is a social action process that can occur at multiple levels, e.g., individual, family, organization, and community…An empowering process is a series of experiences where youth, adults, organizations and communities engage in collective action for social change
Lord & Hutchinson, 1993	Empowerment was defined as processes whereby individuals achieve increasing control of various aspects of their lives and participate in the community with dignity.
Martinez et al., 2017	One of the most common agreements among those authors who deal with empowerment is that all of its definitions include aspects referring to people, groups or communities gaining control and power over their own lives in their life contexts.
Maynard & Stuart, 2018	Empowerment is about a person's sense of power. This includes personal and psychological power, discursive and cultural power… Broadly, empowerment can be seen as people taking control of their lives and becoming a leader of your own life. It is about people gaining greater control of their lives and circumstances.
McLean, 1995	'Empowerment' defines the personal and political processes by which mental health consumers gain validation and restore their sense of dignity and self-worth. Through these processes, consumers come to recognize and begin to exercise control over the material circumstances of their lives. … At the individual level, this involves working to improve their self-concept or personal circumstances…
Mishra, 2014	'Disempowerment' implies the deprivation of choice. Further, 'empowerment' occurs when people previously denied the ability to make crucial life choices obtain the ability to do so.
Molix & Bettencourt, 2010.	We conceptualize psychological empowerment as a predictor of well-being because it is likely to diminish feelings of powerlessness.

Empowerment	Definitions / conceptual framework
Rappaport, 1987	I have suggested that empowerment is a process, a mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs. Consequently, empowerment will look different in its manifest content for different people, organizations, and settings... Empowerment suggests a belief in the power of people to be both the masters of their own fate and involved in the life of their several communities.
Author, 2011	Empowerment is a process of reinforcement whereby individuals, organizations and communities get a grip on their own situation and their environment through gaining personal control, developing critical awareness and encouraging participation.
Wagaman, 2011	Empowerment is the process by which adolescents develop the consciousness and skills necessary to envision social change and understand their role in that change. Adolescents who are empowered are more likely to take action and exercise their power to transform social conditions.
Wallerstein, 2006	Empowerment influences people's ability to act through collective participation by strengthening their organizational capacities, challenging power inequities and achieving outcomes on many reciprocal levels in different domains: psychological empowerment, household relations, enhanced social capital and cohesion, transformed institutions, greater access to resources, open governance and increasingly equitable community conditions.
Zimmerman, 1995	Psychological empowerment refers to empowerment at the individual level of analysis. The construct integrates perceptions of personal control, a proactive approach to life, and a critical understanding of the sociopolitical environment.

2

Chapter **3**

The development of agency in professional youth work with girls and young women in the Netherlands

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, governments in north-west European welfare states have been promoting "active citizenship," which means that citizens are expected to take more care of themselves and each other with support of their social network (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013). As a consequence, there is more attention in the field of social work for the development of "individual strength," so that people are more capable of shaping their own lives (De Boer & Van der Lans, 2011). Reflection on how to shape life and the development of an (adult) identity usually increases during adolescence (approximately from 12 to 18 years old) (Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollenbergh, 1999; Van Beemen, 2006). Most girls manage to do this alone or with help of their social context. However, for girls living in vulnerable circumstances this is especially difficult, because they "face a form of marginalization as a result of deprivation or a lack of skills, capabilities, or opportunities" (Metz, 2017, p. 2) and contradictory role expectations (Batsleer, 2013; Merens, Hartgers, & van den Brakel, 2012).

Professional youth work is one of the social work professions that focuses on supporting young people on their way to adulthood (Cullen, 2013; Metz, 2011b). This profession includes supporting young people with their personal development and their "individual strength" and seeks to support youngsters in their participation at all domains of society (Cullen, 2013; Dunne, Ulicna, Murphy, & Golubeva, 2014; Haidinger, Kasper, Knecht, Kuchler, & Atzmüller, 2016). It is carried out by professional youth workers who were trained through formal education, peer learning and their work experience (Declaration 1st European Youth Work Convention, 2010; Metz, 2017). It is positioned in the leisure time of young people (Dunne et al., 2014; Haidinger et al., 2016; Metz, 2011b) and focuses primarily on young people living in vulnerable circumstances (Declaration 2nd European Youth Work Convention, 2015; Metz, 2017). Youth work takes the lifeworld of young people as its starting point (Metz, 2011b), which means that youth workers are there where young people are (Smith, 2013). Youth work offers young people activities, a place to meet others, the opportunity to learn skills and to obtain information and advice, practical help and individual guidance (Metz, 2013).

These youth work activities are attended more by boys than girls (approximately 10–30% of the youth in these activities are girls) (Gemmeke et al., 2011). This underrepresentation can be attributed to activities that do not appeal to girls, and to parents and caregivers who do not allow girls to participate because of safety concerns (e.g. because they are given in an unfamiliar neighborhood or because boys are present) (Gemmeke et al.,

2011; Metz, 2011b; Valkesteijn, Bakker, Hilverdink, & Metz, 2015; Van Drenth & Te Poel, 1991). Furthermore, boys tend to dominate the youth work space through their more extravert and physical behavior, so that girls feel uncomfortable and stay away (Metz, 2011b). In order to reach girls, youth work providers developed the Girls Work method (Gemmeke et al., 2011; Zuurmond, Geary, & Ross, 2012).

Girls Work in the Netherlands is a gender-specific method of working with girls between the ages of 10 and 23 years within professional youth work. The aim is to support girls in their identity development, so that they are able to shape their own lives and to help them on their way to adulthood (De Boer & Metz, 2012, 2014). An important characteristic of the practice of Girls Work is that it involves an open approach method, which "implies that the professional does not follow a fixed step-by-step plan. Rather, it involves professional interventions in the social domain with a goal-oriented, process-based, moral, and dialogical character" (Donkers, as cited in Metz, 2016, p. 51). Girls Work offers a great variety of activities or focus on themes which are more or less specific for girls (i.e. cooking, dancing, crafts, or just hanging around and talk about themes such as sexuality or self-image). Girls have a say in the kind of activities they want to participate in or the themes they would like to discuss. Therefore, girls sometimes choose the same activities as those which are offered in mixed youth work. What is different for the activities which are offered for girls only is that girls can explore who they are and what they think is important in their lives without the attendance of boys (Metz, 2011b). There are two approaches of Girls Work: the group approach and the individual approach (Van der Grient & Metz, 2018). Within the group approach, the group usually consists of a fairly fixed group of girls, usually 8 – 12 girls. They meet each other with a frequency ranges from once a month to a few times a week. Girls Work also offer individual support. The youth worker or youth work provider chooses one or both approaches "depending on the need of the girl, the context, the organization, and the assignment of the municipality" (Van der Grient & Metz, 2018, p.2).

Despite a history of over 100 years (Metz, 2011a; Spence, 2006; Van Drenth & Te Poel, 1991), little is known about the extent to which Girls Work accomplishes its goals. The main question of this article is therefore: Does Girls Work contribute to the capacity of girls living in vulnerable circumstances to shape their own lives? The research was conducted in close collaboration with eight youth work providers in the Netherlands. Girls who participate in Girls Work filled out an online questionnaire to measure whether they are able to shape their own lives. Shaping one's own life is conceptualized

as Bandura's agency (2006). In this article we first present this theoretical concept of agency. Second, the methods applied by the study are briefly described, along with the setting in which this research was conducted. Third, we describe the results of this study to finally summarize the conclusions and discuss the purpose they may serve in the field of professional youth work.

Agency and Girls Work

Theoretically, the aim of Girls Work can be understood as agency (Boomkens & Metz, 2015). Agency is a theoretical concept that is gaining popularity in the social sciences, especially in relation to vulnerable people like those living in poverty and in relation to the position of women (Borovoy & Ghodsee, 2012; Charrad, 2010; Gonick, Renold, Ringrose, & Weems, 2009; McMunn, Bartley, & Kuh, 2006; Pollack, 2000; Samman & Santos, 2009; Tang & Anderson, 1999). Using the concept of agency, it becomes possible to investigate whether participation in Girls Work contributes to how girls shape their own lives.

There are different interpretations of agency. Agency can be defined as the ability of humans to act (Charrad, 2010). Others describe agency as the ability to make purposeful choices (Samman & Santos, 2009). McMunn et al. (2006) refer to agency as both having intentions to do something and acting upon these intentions. Most studies about agency agree that it pertains to making choices regarding one's own life and trying to act upon these choices (Bandura, 2006; Boomkens & Metz, 2015). Also, most researchers emphasize the role of people's social context in the choices they make (Bandura, 2006; Charrad, 2010), and how girls cope with the limitations that social contexts may place on them (Krumer-Nevo, Berkovitz-Romano, & Komem, 2015). Therefore, we understand agency in this study as the ability of individuals to shape their own life, in relation to their own values and in alignment with their own social context (see also Boomkens & Metz, 2015).

Agency consists of four properties (Bandura, 2006). The first property is intentionality, which refers to the intentional shaping of one's own life. Samman and Santos (2009) refer to these intentions as "making purposeful choices" (p. 12) while Borovoy and Ghodsee (2012) refer to the freedom of women to do whatever they want. The next property, forethought, involves setting realistic goals and anticipating likely outcomes (Bandura, 2006). Borovoy and Ghodsee (2012) emphasize that women, more than men, seek to make comparative assessments between what they want and what

the consequences of their actions could be. Self-reactiveness is the property where intentions are converted into actions (Bandura, 2006). Most researchers emphasize this as an important part of agency (Charrad, 2010; McMunn et al., 2006; Pollack, 2000; Tang & Anderson, 1999). Last, the property of self-reflection refers to how people reflect on their thoughts and actions (Bandura, 2006). When people reflect on their thought and actions, they can develop a clear understanding of their personal efficacy and of the world around them (Tang & Anderson, 1999).

This concept of agency provides a framework that helps to understand the potential contribution of Girls Work to the development of the individual strength which girls need to become active citizens as adults. It suggests that in order to shape one's own life as adults, girls need to develop all four properties of agency. From this theoretical perspective, we expect that girls' participation in Girls Work correlates positively with the development of agency.

METHODS

We used a cross-sectional design to explore whether girls' participation in Girls Work contributes to their agency. We compared the degree of agency of girls who had participated for a longer amount of time with girls who started to participate more recently. Using a quantitative design, we were able to collect information about a large number of variables in a short period of time and managed to identify relations between different variables (Robson, 2011). Girls who participate in Girls Work offered by eight youth work providers in urban and rural areas in the Netherlands were asked to fill out an online questionnaire. Students and researchers supported girls with the questionnaires and, if needed, provided a paper version of the questionnaire. As there is no scale available that measures the concept of agency according to Bandura's (2006) theory, we constructed it ourselves.

The research was performed in close collaboration with youth work practice. Eight (previously nine, but two merged together during this research) youth work providers in urban and rural areas in the Netherlands opened their practice for data collection, arranged youth workers to participate in the masterclass, and girls to participated in the girls group. The reason for the collaboration with the masterclass and the girls group was to ensure that the research methods fit Girls Work practice (Metz, 2016).

At least two youth workers per youth work provider participated in the masterclass. The task of the masterclass was to support the development of the questionnaire, to decide how and where data should be collected, and to inform other youth workers within their organizations. We consulted the masterclass to examine whether the items met the criteria of agency, which resulted in some changes to the questionnaire. Together with their managers, the youth workers selected the activities to include in this research. Afterward, we presented the results of this study to them to validate our findings and together we sought to explicate and understand our research findings.

The girls group consisted of at least two girls per youth work provider who also participate in their Girls Work activities. We consulted the girls group once to present the questionnaire to check the following conditions: comprehension of the questions, attractiveness, and duration. Next, we tested the questionnaire twice with four different girls of the girls group, which led to minor adjustments such as the deletion or reformulation of some questions. Girls who participated in the girls group were treated to a goody bag and a collective dinner in return for their participation.

Sample and procedure

Approximately 80 Girls Work activities by eight youth work providers in the Netherlands were selected to participate in this research. Some of the data collection had been cancelled or rescheduled for a variety of reasons, e.g. sickness of the youth worker or participant, problems with public transportation due to weather conditions, a fight between the girls, and too much pressure on a youth worker involved in multiple selected activities. The 52 remaining Girls Work activities were visited at least once to collect the data. Only girls who participate in Girls Work were invited to participate in this study.

The data for this study were collected between November 2016 and February 2017. Girls aged between 10 and 23 were asked to fill out a questionnaire during regular Girls Work activities. The respondents filled out the questionnaire online with the support of trained students of several universities and researchers. When no internet was available, girls could fill out a paper version of the questionnaire. To reduce response bias, the youth worker was absent from the room during the data collection. Respondents were offered a certificate and a wristband with the text “girls run the world” after finishing the questionnaire. Prior to the study, the youth worker informed the girls and their parents

by letter and a flyer and gave them the opportunity to refuse participation by contacting the researcher or youth worker. Girls could also refuse to participate on the day itself.

All girls who were present on the day of data collection were asked to participate in the research. Although there are no exact numbers available of girls refusing to participate, the researcher knows that at least three girls refused to participate due to their lack of command of the language (i.e. girls who had lived only a couple of years in the Netherlands or because of their poor cognitive skills). Most of these girls tried to participate with help from the researcher or student, but the length of the survey made it too difficult to complete. Some activities were visited twice or more in case we did not reach at least 25% of the girls participating in that activity (due to a lack of time or girls who did not show up that day). Approximately 632–676 girls participated in these Girls Work activities. The number is uncertain due to incomplete registrations and weekly fluctuating attendance numbers. Of the 632–676 girls who participated in these activities, 435 girls completed the questionnaire (response rate of approximately 65%). In 39 cases, the online questionnaire failed to yield any answers because the participant did not press "send" or because of an instable Wi-Fi connection. Finally, we excluded three respondents who were younger than 10 years old. This led to the final sample of 393 girls (approximately 58%).

Table 1 shows that most girls who participated in this research were young girls between the age of 10 and 13 years (55.2%). The mean age of the sample is 13.68 years old (*SD* = 3.27). Most girls were born in the Netherlands, but they had a mixed cultural background (74%). From the girls attending secondary school, 72% follows vocational education and 28% higher education.

Table 1
Age of the sample

Age	*n*	%
10 – 13 years	217	55.2
14 – 17 years	126	32.1
18 – 23 years	50	12.7
Total	393	100

Measures

Participation in Girls Work was measured with two variables: the duration of participation in Girls Work and the intensity of participation in Girls Work. The duration of participation was measured with four response categories (less than six months/between six months and one year/between one and three years/longer than three years), while the intensity of participation was measured with three response categories (more than once a week/once a week/less than once a week). We asked girls what *type of Girls Work* they were participating in. They could choose between the response categories: group activities, only individual contact with their youth worker, or a combination of group activities and individual contact with the youth worker. Girls could choose an *age* between 10 and 23 years and were later split into three age groups (10–13 years, 14–17 years, 18–23 years).

Since we could not find a scale to measure the concept of *agency* (dependent variable) as defined by Bandura (2006), we constructed it ourselves. Based on Bandura, we operationalized the concept of agency in the four properties: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflection. Next, we generated 13 items to measure agency (see Appendix B for the translated scale). Items were measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1 representing "strongly disagree" to 5 representing "strongly agree." Before we started the analysis, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (principal component analysis and direct oblimin rotation) of the responses of the 393 respondents to determine the validity of the questionnaire measuring agency. We examined all the factors evident when the eigenvalues are >1.

Table 2
Construction of the scale and subscales of agency

	Variance explained	α	Number of items	Minimum - maximum
Factor 1: intentionality	25.2%	.813	4	1 - 5
Factor 2: forethought	11.1%	.748	4	1 - 5
Factor 3: self-reactiveness	10.5%	.760	3	1 - 5
Factor 4: self-reflection	7.5%	.753	2	1 - 5
Agency: total	-	.833	13	1 - 5

Four of the factors were directly related with the four properties of agency. Factor 1 (intentionality) explained 25.2% of the variance. Four items were selected in the final subscale (α = .813). Factor 2 measuring forethought explained 11.1% of the variance and also consisted of four items in the final subscale (α = .748). Self-reactiveness (factor 3) was constructed by three items that explained 10.5% of the variance (α = .760). Finally, factor 4 (self-reflection) explained 7.5% of the variance (α = .753). To measure agency as a whole, we used these 13 items (α = .833). See also Table 2. The analyses were carried out using SPSS PASW Statistics 18. Age differences were assessed via analysis of variance (ANOVA). As covariates we controlled for age.

Ethical considerations

This study is carried out in line with the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice (VSNU, 2014). For example, participation in the study was voluntary. Prior to the study, the youth worker informed the girls and their parents (especially when girls were younger than 16 years old) by letter about the study, what participation in this study implies, and what parents or girls need to do if they want to withdraw from the study. To make sure that all the parents and girls knew about the study, posters were hung in the spaces or hallways of all participating Girls Work activities. The letters and posters were provided to the youth workers by the researchers.

The girls and their parents were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study by contacting the researcher or youth worker. It was also possible to withdraw themselves from the study on the day itself or even during the study. Anonymity of all the girls and the Girls Work activities which they attended was ensured, since no personal or impertinent questions were asked. The questionnaire only focused on how girls develop themselves within Girls Work and questions were formulated in a positive way so that the study itself was not intrusive. Students, who supported in the data collection, signed a confidentially form before they could visit the Girls Work activities. The data collection was approved by the managers of all the youth work providers who participated in this study and the researchers have no conflict of interest.

RESULTS

Descriptives: Participation in Girls Work

As described earlier, the mean age of girls was 13.68 years old (*SD* = 3.27). Although most girls were born in the Netherlands (92%), the majority have a father (74.3%) or a mother (70%) who was born in another country. Most of the parents who were born outside the Netherlands are from Morocco (in the 1970s a lot of people from Morocco migrated to the Netherlands as guest workers; today, second- and third-generation Moroccans are in a vulnerable position due to discrimination, low socioeconomic status, and living in deprived areas). A total of 72.5% of the girls live with both their parents and 20.1% live with one parent. Other residents live: alone (1.3%), "I have no permanent residence" (1.3%), with another relative (1.0%), in sheltered living (1.0%), with a partner (0.8%), or with friends (0.5%). Almost all girls attend school (primary school: 35.6%, secondary school: 56.2%) or have a paid job (3.3%). Of the girls attending secondary school, 71.9% follow vocational education and 28.1% higher education.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics of independent variables

	n	*%*
Intensity		
More than once a week	82	20.9
Once a week	226	57.5
Less than once a week	83	21.1
Duration		
Less than 6 months	180	45.8
Between 6 months and 1 year	60	15.3
Between 1 and 3 years	91	23.2
More than 3 years	61	15.5
Type of Girls Work		
Group	227	70.5
Individual	35	8.9
Both	80	20.4

The questionnaire gave insight into how girls participate in Girls Work. Table 3 presents descriptive information about their participation. Most girls in our sample made use of a Girls Work activity once a week (57.5%). It is notable that a lot of girls in our sample had participated in Girls Work at the moment of the study for less than six months

(45.8%). A total of 70.5% of the girls in this sample participated in group activities, where only 8.9% participated in individual Girls Work. A total of 20.4% used a combination of group activities and individual Girls Work. The masterclass confirmed these outcomes.

Table 4
Descriptive statistics for the full sample and separately by age, duration, intensity and type of Girls Work

	Agency total	Agency properties			
	M (SD)	Intentionality	Forethought	self-reactiveness	self-reflection
		M (SD)	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*
Full sample	3.85 (0.53)	4.00 (0.79)	3.85 (0.69)	3.96 (0.71)	3.54 (0.87)
Age					
10 – 13	3.74 (0.54)	3.74 (0.81)	3.79 (0.72)	3.94 (0.73)	3.45 (0.89)
14 – 17	3.90 (0.49)	4.19 (0.64)	3.81 (0.60)	3.95 (0.71)	3.59 (0.84)
18 – 23	4.20 (0.42)	4.62 (0.46)	4.18 (0.65)	4.07 (0.62)	3.81 (0.78)
Duration					
Less than 6 months	3.79 (0.52)	3.81 (0.82)	3.84 (0.63)	3.96 (0.62)	3.56 (0.85)
Between 6 months and 1 year	3.78 (0.46)	4.09 (0.65)	3.79 (0.69)	3.82 (0.84)	3.29 (0.95)
Between 1 and 3 years	3.87 (0.60)	4.06 (0.80)	3.82 (0.81)	3.98 (0.78)	3.54 (0.85)
More than 3 years	4.07 (0.48)	4.40 (0.63)	4.00 (0.64)	4.10 (0.68)	3.75 (0.81)
Intensity					
More than once a week	3.91 (0.56)	4.02 (0.82)	3.95 (0.67)	4.04 (0.74)	3.60 (0.87)
Once a week	3.84 (0.53)	4.00 (0.78)	3.81 (0.70)	3.97 (0.68)	3.52 (0.88)
Less than once a week	3.81 (0.51)	3.96 (0.80)	3.85 (0.67)	3.85 (0.73)	3.55 (0.83)
Type of Girls Work					
Group	3.79 (0.54)	3.93 (0.78)	3.81 (0.67)	3.92 (0.72)	3.45 (0.89)
Individual	3.91 (0.41)	4.14 (0.66)	3.87 (0.72)	3.88 (0.59)	3.70 (0.80)
Both	4.02 (0.54)	4.16 (0.84)	3.98 (0.73)	4.12 (0.70)	3.79 (0.75)

Agency

Next we measured the level of agency (see Table 4). The girls assigned a score for the level of agency with a mean of 3.85 (*SD* = 0.54). Respondents showed the highest level of agency on the property of intentionality. The numbers showed a correlation between an increasing age and level of agency, and applying to all four properties of agency. The level of agency also appeared to increase, the longer girls participated in Girls Work. The level of agency increased slightly, the more frequently the girls participated. Lastly, it is notable that girls who participated in both group activities and

individual Girls Work showed higher levels of agency than those who only participated in one type of Girls Work.

Contribution of Girls Work to agency

The results from the ANOVA showed that, when we controlled for age, there is no contribution of the duration of participation to agency ($F(3, 387) = 1.32$, $p = .269$). We did find a significant relation between age and agency ($F(1, 387) = 22.19$, $p = .000$). This indicated no significant contribution of duration to agency. Next, we carried out an ANOVA for each of the four properties of agency and the duration of participation in Girls Work and controlled it for age. Again we did not find a significant contribution of the duration to forethought, self-reactiveness, or self-reflection (see Table 5). However, we did find a significant contribution of duration to intentionality ($F(3, 387) = 4.60$, $p = .004$). Girls who had participated longer showed more intentionality than girls who had participated shorter in Girls Work. The ANOVA for intensity of participation in Girls Work (frequency) and agency showed no significant contribution of the intensity of participation in Girls Work and agency ($F(2, 388) = 0.81$, $p = .447$). Furthermore, there was no significant contribution of the intensity to the four properties of agency. This suggests that the frequency of participation in Girls Work did not contribute to the level of agency.

Table 5
Outcomes ANOVA for the four properties of agency and duration, controlled for age

	df	*SS*	*MS*	*F* (3, 387)	*p*
Intentionality	3	7.03*	2.34	4.60	.004
Forethought	3	0.36	0.12	0.26	ns
Self-reactiveness	3	2.10	0.70	1.40	ns
Self-reflection	3	3.92	1.31	1.31	ns

Notes. *Adjusted R Squared = .18
ns = not statistically significant

Finally, we wanted to know whether the type of Girls Work contributed to agency (see also Table 6). ANOVA indicated no significant contribution of the type of Girls Work to the general level of agency ($F(2, 388) = 1.63$, $p = .197$). When we ran ANOVA for the four properties of agency and controlled it for age, we found a significant contribution of the type of Girls Work to self-reflection ($F(2, 388) = 3.10$, $p = .046$). Girls who participated individually ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.80$) or used a combination of individual and group Girls

Work (*M* = 3.79, *SD* = 0.75) showed more self-reflection than girls who participated only in group activities (*M* = 3.45, *SD* = 0.89).

Table 6
Outcomes ANOVA for type of Girls Work on the four properties of agency

	df	*SS*	*MS*	*F* (2, 388)	*p*
Intentionality	2	.02	.01	0.02	ns
Forethought	2	.63	.31	0.68	ns
Self-reactiveness	2	2.27	1.13	2.28	ns
Self-reflection	2	4.53*	2.26	3.10	.046

Notes. * adjusted R Squared = .03 ns = not statistically significant

DISCUSSION

With the present study we examined whether Girls Work contributes to girls' identity development, so that they are capable of shaping their own lives as adults (De Boer & Metz, 2014). In theoretical terms, this can be described as "agency": the capacity of individuals to shape one's own life, in relation to their own values and in alignment with their own social context (Bandura, 2006; Boomkens & Metz, 2015). Although we find a significant effect between the duration of participation in Girls Work and the level of agency, this effect is strongly influenced by the age of girls. This suggests that the development to maturity is an important predictor of agency. Young people usually start to think about who they are and who they want to be as adults (the identity development) around the age of 12 and this continues to develop throughout the adolescence (on average up to 18 years) and even into adulthood (Van Beemen, 2006). The relation between the age of girls and the level of agency is in line with this development. Therefore, the rest of the analyses were controlled for age.

When we concentrate on the four properties of agency, we find a significant contribution of the duration of participation in Girls Work to intentionality, even when we control this effect for age. This result suggests that Girls Work contributes mostly to developing thoughtful intentions. An agent is someone who "intentionally makes things happen by one's own actions" (Bandura, 2001, p. 2). This means that forming intentions is a crucial step in the development of agency. Intentions are a representation of a future course to which people proactively commit themselves. The youth workers represented in the masterclass confirm this outcome. They explained that they support girls in the

development of intentionality by discussing themes that relate to their future, so that girls are stimulated to think about what they want for themselves. The youth workers also mentioned that by talking about the future and the activities they organize, they try to motivate girls to change something in their lives. They also support the self-efficacy of the girls, by giving positive attention to individual girls and their strengths.

We also find a significant contribution between the type of Girls Work and the level of self-reflection. Girls who use a combination of individual and group Girls Work or participate only individually are better able to "reflect on their motivation, values, and the meaning of their life pursuits" (Bandura, 2001, p. 10) than girls who only participate in group activities. This outcome suggests that an individual approach in Girls Work, rather than group activities, contributes to the development of their thinking and the outcomes.

Finally, no significant effect is obtained between the intensity in which girls participate and agency. This suggests that the frequency with which girls participate in Girls Work activities does not influence their level of agency. Since most girls in this study participate in Girls Work on a weekly basis, we cannot state with certainty that there is no effect between intensity and agency.

Limitations of the study

Although the findings in the present study suggest that there is an effect between the duration of participation in Girls Work and the intentionality of girls, our study has some limitations. The first concerns the use of a self-report survey. Although the scale for agency is reliable and we made sure that the respondents understood the questions correctly, it is still possible that the respondents see themselves differently than how they perform in practice or how they are perceived by their surroundings. Further research could investigate the level of agency as reported by the youth worker.

Second, we noticed that the 10-year-old girls (n = 60) and girls with cognitive disabilities had more trouble understanding the questions that measure agency. Although most young girls, sometimes with the help of the students or the researchers, did not have any problems with filling out the questionnaire, we doubt whether they could fully understand what the implications are of what they were questioned about. A qualitative study could help to better understand these girls' agency.

Since people usually start to think about their future around the age of 12, it is possible that some of the younger girls (between 10 and 12) have not yet started with developing agency. But because the target group of Girls Work starts with the age of 10 and youth workers focus also on their agency, we decided to include these young girls in our study, and to control the outcomes for age.

A third limitation of this study is the cross-sectional design. As the survey was conducted at one point in time, it is difficult to infer causality. However, this design indicates an effect between participation in Girls Work and intentionality. Future research should focus on this effect using a longitudinal design or a control group.

Fourth, this study operationalized agency as the ability of individuals to shape their own life, in relation to their own values and in alignment with their own social context. However, we did not interrogate the girls about the influence of their social context on their ability to shape their own life. Further research should focus on understanding how the girls' social context influences their ability to shape their own life.

Last, the results are only valid for Girls Work in the Netherlands and cannot be generalized to other countries. It would be of interest to replicate this study outside the Netherlands.

Conclusion

The current study contributes to our understanding of the contribution of Girls Work to how girls shape their own lives. The findings suggest that participation in Girls Work contributes to the intentionality of girls living in vulnerable circumstances, which is the first property of agency and an important step in the development toward active citizenship. The development of intentionality implies that the target group of Girls Work is better able to make thoughtful choices about who they want to be in life, instead of simply accepting the life that their social network expects them to have. When girls form intentions about their life course, they will proactively commit themselves to achieve this. For Girls Work, this means that there are strong indications that it actually contributes to how girls think about what will be important in their life as adults and who they want to be in society.

The study also suggests that Girls Work in the Netherlands at present does not contribute to the development of forethought, self-reaction, and self-reflection. This

does not mean that Girls Work is unable to contribute to the development of these characteristics, but that contemporary practice is not very successful in this respect. For the further development of Girls Work in the Netherlands, it means that Girls Work should focus more on the potential consequences of actions and on helping girls to act upon their intentions. Finally, the study indicates that girls who receive an individual approach (in combination with group activities or not) are better capable of reflecting on their actions than girls who only participate in group activities. This suggests that in situations in which girls need to develop their self-reflection, it is better to use an individual approach.

Appendix B

Youth Agency Scale (original in Dutch).

We have developed this scale to measure the agency of girls between 10 and 23 years, who participate in professional girls work in the Netherlands.

	Strongly disagree	Mildly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mildly agree	Strongly agree
Intentionality					
I want to make my own decision about my future					
I want to make my own decision about my life					
I want to determine who I want to be					
I want to be responsible for everything I will do					
Forethought					
I consider in advance how to do something					
I think about what the consequences of my choices can be					
I take into account the possible consequences of my choices					
I think about what I can do myself					
Self-reactiveness					
I can be who I want to be					
I can achieve what I want to achieve					
I can take responsibility for my actions					
Self-reflection					
When I look back, I ask myself whether my expectations came true					
When I look back, I ask myself whether I have achieved what I wanted to achieve					

Chapter **4**

How girls recognize the methodic actions of their youth workers in different Girls Work approaches

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INTRODUCTION

Policy on professional youth work in Europe has moved toward more evidence-based youth work (Dunne, Ulicna, Murphy, & Golubeva, 2014). As a result, youth work providers in the Netherlands are searching for the best way to substantiate their work, including the Girls Work method. Girls Work is a method of professional youth work that focuses on supporting girls between 10 and 23 years old. What youth workers do in contact with girls to reach this goal is described as *methodic principles* (De Boer & Metz, 2012, 2014). These are the guiding principles that form the basis of the methodic actions of youth workers in contact with the target group (Metz & Sonneveld, 2012). Since the methodic principles influence the development of girls through the interactions between youth worker and the girls, we wanted to investigate how the target group recognize the methodic principles of their youth workers. Also, because the methodic principles should be applied in Girls Work irrespective of the girls' ages, their cultural background, how long they have participated in Girls Work and the particular Girls Work approach, we also wanted to investigate whether the recognition of the methodic principles are influenced by these variables. First, we further explain the Girls Work method.

The aim of Girls Work in the Netherlands is to support girls between the ages of 10 and 23 with their identity development, so they are better able to shape their own lives on their way to adulthood (Batsleer, 2013; De Boer & Metz, 2014; Gemmeke et al., 2011; Van der Zande, 1991). Although most girls do not need professional support for this, a (growing) group of girls cannot do this on their own or with only the support of their social context (Abdallah, 2017). This is because these girls are more vulnerable than others, e.g. they live in a stressful home situation or in poverty, are subject to abuse, have problems at school, or have a disability (cognitive, mental, social or physical). These so-called vulnerable girls can join Girls Work, which offers them an exploration space in which they learn more about themselves and the world around them (Metz, 2013). Girls Work is positioned in the sectors of girls' leisure time activities (Dunne et al., 2014; Haidinger, Kasper, Knecht, Kuchler, & Atzmüller, 2016). Youth workers connect with the world as experienced by girls in daily life, which means that youth workers are present at the same locations as girls and they work from girls' perspectives and needs (Metz, 2011b). Girls Work in the Netherlands is carried out by professional youth workers (i.e. they are paid and have completed a formal education (Metz, 2017)). There are different types of Girls Work approaches: First, there is a group approach, which usually consists of the youth worker(s) and a fairly fixed group of girls (approximately 8 – 12 girls). Second, there is also an individual approach, in which the youth worker offers a girl individual support. Some girls make use of both the

group and individual approaches. The choice for a specific approach depends "on the girl's needs, the context, the organization, and the assignment of the municipality" (Van der Grient & Metz, 2018, p. 2).

What is characteristic about the Girls Work method is that it is an open approach method (Metz, 2016). This implies that youth workers choose their approach based on the situation, wishes and possibilities of the people involved. This makes it difficult to describe and substantiate the Girls Work method. Therefore, in an earlier research (De Boer & Metz, 2012, 2014), youth workers of Girls Work were asked to describe the *methodic principles* of Girls Work, irrespective of the approach, situation, age of girls etc. Methodic principles are the guiding principles underlying the methodic actions of the youth workers in contact with the target group (Metz & Sonneveld, 2012). All youth workers who work in Girls Work apply these principles, but how and when they apply them depends on the situation, goals, persons and resources available for the given methods, target groups, goals and contexts (Metz, 2016). Also, they can be applied separately or in combination. De Boer and Metz (2012, 2014) identified the methodic principles for Girls Work through focus groups and individual interviews with youth workers who work with girls, and the results were presented to these and other youth workers for validation. Their study resulted in the identification of nine methodic principles for Girls Work (see Table 1).

It was argued that the methodic principles offer a model to substantiate the Girls Work method that considers the open approach of the Girls Work method (Metz, 2016). Because the methodic principles are expressed in interaction with the girls, the aim of this study is to investigate whether girls recognize these methodic principles in their Girls Work activity and whether any of the methodic principles is recognized more than others. Also, we want to examine whether the recognition of the methodic principles are influenced by four variables: age, cultural background, participation in Girls Work and Girls Work approach. Girls Work focuses on girls of different ages and cultural backgrounds, and girls participate for different lengths of time in Girls Work, and in different Girls Work approaches. The methodic principles should be applied in Girls Work, despite differences in the background of girls and the Girls Work approach. Therefore, we looked for differences in the application of methodic principles as recognized by different girls who use Girls Work in different ways. With this information, youth work providers can strengthen and substantiate the methodic actions of youth workers, as it offers empirical insights into how the methodic principles - that they have helped to identify – are recognized by their target group.

Table 1
Description of the methodic principles (based on: Boomkens, Rauwerdink-Nijland, Van der Grient, Van Trijp & Metz, 2018)

Methodic principle	Description
Safety	Girls need to feel safe to be or to explore who they are in the Girls Work activity. Youth workers focus on both physical safety (it is safe for girls to go to the accommodation where Girls Work is located, there is a separate room for girls where boys cannot enter) and social safety (the youth worker has attention for tensions between girls, agrees with the girls on the rules of the activity, makes sure it is safe for girls to share stories and experiences).
Meaningful relationship	The relationship between the girl(s) and the youth worker should be important enough to make a difference in their lives. A meaningful relationship causes girls to trust the youth worker, to express herself and to take the input of the youth worker seriously.
Acquaintance	With this methodic principle, the youth worker discovers who girls really are. Youth workers come to understand the characteristics, insecurities, dreams, limitations, talents etc. of the girls.
Take into account the needs of girls	The youth worker seeks to meet the needs of every girl, the group as a whole, questions and circumstances. This methodic principle is about doing whatever fits the girl(s) needs at that specific moment. It can be about something that the girls specifically ask for, but also something that the youth worker signals. In that case it is about an unconscious or latent need of girls.
Positive motivation	Actively point out what girls have achieved. Instead of punishing girls for bad actions or things that went wrong, youth workers focus on what went well, what possibilities there are, and rewarding girls for the actions they take.
Boundaries	To make girls aware of generally accepted behavior and how their behavior affects others. This methodic principle also includes supporting girls to know their own boundaries and how to indicate them to others.
Expanding lifeworld	The youth worker exposes girls to experiences, social opportunities or chances which were unknown or unreachable to the girls. When girls encounter something new or experience something differently, they learn more from the society in which they grow up and how to use it.
Talk	Talking refers to the many and easy ways that girls talk. By using different conversation techniques, youth workers learn who the girls are and what goes on internally and in their lives, and youth workers or the group can offer support. Girls learn to express themselves and become aware of their development, situation, accepted behavior etc.
Use of social context	Youth workers collaborate with family, friends, networks, organizations and facilities outside of Girls Work. Youth workers involve the social context when they think that this social context can make a positive contribution to the girls' development. When the social context has a negative influence on the girls, youth workers can try to reduce this negative influence by working together with that social context.

Also, it gives youth work providers information about how the methodic principles are being applied and whether this varies for girls or Girls Work approaches.

METHODS

Design

In this study, we used a cross-sectional design in which we asked girls who participate in Girls Work to fill out an online questionnaire. These girls participated in Girls Work activities of eight youth work providers located in urban and rural areas throughout the Netherlands, with whom we performed this research in a partnership approach (Gilovich, 1993; Marsh, 2007). This is a collaboration between researchers, professionals and teachers who are all responsible for formulating the research question, the data collection, the analysis and the interpretation of the results. It was important for this research to have access to the target group in order to ensure that the research methods were appropriate for the Girls Work practice and to validate the outcomes (Metz, 2016). The collaboration consisted of having access to the practice for data-collection and to have the participation of at least two youth workers per youth work provider in the *masterclass* and two girls in the *girls group.* The task of the masterclass was to assist with the development of the questionnaire (see also *measurement*), to decide how and where data should be collected, to validate the findings, to find explanations for the findings and to inform other youth workers within their organizations. The task of the girls group was to assist with the development (comprehension of the questions, attractiveness and duration) and the testing of the questionnaire. Girls who participated in the girls group were treated to a goody bag and a collective dinner with their youth workers and researchers in return for their participation

Sample and procedure

Youth workers of the masterclass selected approximately 80 different Girls Work activities to involve in this research. For a variety of reasons (e.g. sickness of the youth worker, problems with public transportation due to weather conditions, a fight between the girls, or too much pressure on a youth worker involved in multiple selected activities), some of the data collection had to be cancelled or rescheduled. Eventually, 52 Girls Work activities were visited between November 2016 and February 2017. Some activities were visited twice or more in order to reach at least 25% of the girls participating in that activity. Between 632 to 676 girls made use of the selected Girls Work activities; the actual number is uncertain due to incomplete registrations and weekly fluctuating attendance numbers. Eventually, 435 girls completed the questionnaire. In 39 cases, the

online questionnaire failed to yield any answers because the participant did not press 'send' or because of an instable Wi-Fi connection. Three respondents were excluded because they were younger than 10 years old. This led to the final sample of 393 girls, between the ages of 10 and 23.

During the data collection, all girls who were present at the Girls Work activity were invited to participate in the data collection. Before the Girls Work activities were visited, the youth workers informed the girls and their parents by letter and a flyer, which were provided to them by the researcher. Both girls and parents could refuse participation by informing the researcher or youth worker, by not showing up on the day of the data collection, or by refusing to participate on the day itself. Therefore, no exact numbers are available of girls refusing to participate. It is however known to the researcher that at least three girls refused to participate on the day itself, because of their poor command of the language (i.e., girls who had lived only a couple of years in the Netherlands, or because of their poor cognitive skills).

Girls who participated in the research filled out the questionnaire during regular Girls Work activities. The youth worker was working in a different room during the survey to reduce response bias. The respondents filled out the questionnaire online, or when no internet was available, girls were offered the option of filling out a paper version of the questionnaire. The data were collected by the researchers or trained social work students (20 students), who assisted girls with completing the questionnaire. The students were trained regarding their attitude to the girls and the assurance of confidentiality. After finishing the questionnaire, respondents were offered a certificate and a wristband with the text "*girls run the world*".

Measures

To examine whether girls recognize the methodic principles of Girls Work, we used a self-constructed scale. The methodic principles were identified in a prior study (De Boer & Metz, 2014), and this report was used to operationalize the methodic principles. First, the researchers used the report to construct items which were measured on a five- or four-point Likert scale. Next, the operationalization was presented to the masterclass. Youth workers from the masterclass were divided into four groups and each group was presented the items of the questionnaire as puzzle pieces. Each group had to place the puzzle pieces to the methodic principle that they thought it corresponded best. After all items were matched with the methodic principles, we compared the answers of the

four groups and the operationalization of the researchers. Differences were discussed, which led to the adjustment of some of the items. This method was chosen to make sure we operationalized the methodic principles correctly. The operationalization of the items was also presented to the girls group to make sure the girls fully understood the questions, i.e. difficult words were underlined by the girls.

After the data collection, we conducted both an exploratory factor analysis and a reliability analysis of each of the methodic principles. Based on that we had to remove several items, which led to the use of 28 items (see Table 2). The items all measured different aspects of each methodic principle. Items were initially measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree) or a four-point Likert scale (1 = never; 2 = sometimes; 3 = often; 4 = always). Because we wanted to compare all the items, we recoded them into a three-point Likert scale (1 = disagree; 2 = sometimes / neither agree nor disagree; 3 = agree). The methodic principle *expanding lifeworld* was measured with one item. However, girls who agreed with this item received a follow-up question about which social contexts and opportunities they got to know because of their participation in Girls Work. The items measuring *use of social context* was not measured correctly due to an error in the software. Therefore, we decided to leave this methodic principle out of the analysis. The analyses were carried out using SPSS PASW Statistics 18.

Table 2
Construction of the scale and subscales of the methodic principles

	Number of items	α
Safety	1	-
Meaningful relationship	4	.84
Acquaintance (Knowing)	4	.89
Take into account the needs of girls	2	.71
Positive motivation	6	.75
Boundaries	9	.89
Talk	1	-
Expanding lifeworld	1	-

We selected two variables pertaining to the girls (age and cultural background) and two variables pertaining to Girls Work (duration of participation and approach) to examine differences in the girls' recognition of the methodic principles. Within the questionnaire,

girls filled in their *age* and this was later used to divide the girls into three age groups (10 to 13 years, 14 to 17 years, 18 to 23 years). Also, girls filled out the country in which they and their parents were born. This was used to divide the girls into two groups: girls with a Western and girls with a non-Western *background*. *Participation in Girls Work* was measured with four response categories (less than 6 months / between 6 months and 1 year / between 1 and 3 years / longer than 3 years). Last, we asked girls what Girls Work *approach* they were participating in. They could choose between the categories: only in group activities, only individual contact with their youth worker or a combination of both group activities and individual contact.

Ethical considerations

This research was conducted in accordance with the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice (VSNU, 2014). First, youth workers informed the girls and their parents (especially when girls were under the age of 16) by letter about the study, what it would entail to participate in this study, and what the parents or girls should do if they did not wish to participate in the study or if they wished to withdraw during the study. To ensure that all parents and girls were aware of the study, posters were hung in the rooms or corridors of all participating Girls Work activities. Second, the anonymity of all the girls and the Girls Work activities which they attended was ensured, since no personal or impertinent questions were asked. Third, questions were formulated in a positive way to make sure that the study itself was not intrusive for girls. Fourth, students who helped with the data collection signed a confidentiality form before visiting the Girls Work activities. Fifth, the managers of all the youth work providers who participated in this study approved the data collection; and last, the researchers have no conflict of interest.

RESULTS

The four variables examined

As described above, we compared the presence of the methodic principles with four variables of girls (age and cultural background) and Girls Work (duration of participation and approach of Girls Work) (see also Table 3). Most girls in our sample were young girls of 10 – 13 years (M = 13.68 years; SD = 3.27). It is notable that 74% of the girls in our sample have a non-Western background. When focusing on the variables of Girls Work, Table 3 shows that most girls in our sample had participated in Girls Work at the moment of the study for less than 6 months (45.8%). The majority of the girls in our sample participated in only group activities (70.5%), and only 8.9% participated in individual Girls Work. 20.4% used a combination of group activities and individual

Girls Work. The masterclass confirmed that these outcomes are representative for girls participating in Girls Work.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics of the four variables

	n	%
Age		
10-13 years	217	55.2
14-17 years	126	32.1
18-23 years	50	12.7
Cultural background		
Western background	105	26.7
Non-Western background	287	73.0
Participation in Girls Work		
Less than 6 months	180	45.8
Between 6 months and 1 year	60	15.3
Between 1 and 3 years	91	23.2
More than 3 years	61	15.5
Girls Work approach		
Group	227	70.5
Individual	35	8.9
Both	80	20.4

Presence of methodic principles

Next, we measured to what extent girls recognized the methodic principles (see Table 4). Respondents recognized the methodic principle *Talk* the most. The results show that girls indeed have conversations with both the youth worker and/or other girls who participate in Girls Work about anything they want to talk about. According to the youth workers in the masterclass, this methodic principle is the 'engine of Girls Work'. The results of this study confirm this statement, because girls recognize this methodic principle more than all other methodic principles. Other methodic principles that are frequently recognized are *safety* and *meaningful relationship*. Girls state that they feel safe to be themselves and to come to Girls Work and that girls think they have a good relationship with their youth worker.

Respondents recognize the methodic principle *expanding lifeworld* the least. This suggests that, according to the girls, youth workers have the least attention for exposing girls to new or unknown experiences and (social) opportunities. A follow-up question confirms this. Most girls indicate that they make new friends within Girls Work. However, only 10% of the girls encounter new social contexts such as social services, sport clubs, cities, schools or museums.

Table 4
Descriptive statistics for the methodic principles

	n	*M (SD)*
Methodic principle		
Safety	390	2.81 (0.44)
Meaningful relationship	392	2.78 (0.49)
Acquaintance (Knowing)	392	2.59 (0.72)
Take into account the needs of girls	392	2.50 (0.62)
Positive motivation	392	2.73 (0.47)
Boundaries	392	2.56 (0.47)
Talk	387	2.86 (0.34)
Expanding lifeworld	390	2.17 (0.69)

Influence of the four variables on the presence of methodic principles

Our second research question was whether the extent to which girls recognize the methodic principles depends on the girls' age and cultural background, on how long girls have participated in Girls Work, or on the Girls Work approach (see Table 5). Results from the ANOVA showed that the age of girls has an influence on how they recognize all the methodic principles (Bonferroni test showed that girls in the oldest age group recognized all methodic principles more than girls in the youngest age group). Girls with a non-Western background recognized five of the methodic principles more than girls with a Western background. The results show that duration of participation in Girls Work least influences the presence of three of the methodic principles. Girls who have participated in Girls Work for longer recognize these methodic principles more than girls who have participated less long.

The Girls Work approach also influences how girls recognized five of the methodic principles. The results from Bonferroni test shows that girls who use both the individual and group approach recognize the methodic principle 'expanding lifeworld' significantly

more than girls who participate in only group approaches. Also, girls who participate in an individual approach recognize the methodic principle 'boundaries' significantly more than girls who participate in a group approach. Three of the methodic principles (acquaintance, take into account the needs of girls and positive motivation) are recognized significantly less by girls in the group approach than girls who participate in the other two approaches.

These results might suggest that the presence of methodic principles is influenced by these four variables. However, these variables seem to be related to each other (e.g. older girls participate longer in Girls Work). Therefore, we carried out an ANOVA for each methodic principle and the four variables together (see Table 6). The results show that when all variables were inserted in the model, only the age of the girls influences the recognition of the methodic principles *safety* and *boundaries*. Bonferroni test showed that girls in the oldest age group recognized these methodic principles significantly more than girls in the youngest age group (for the methodic principle safety) or more than all other girls (for the methodic principle boundaries). The presence of the other methodic principles is not influenced by any of the variables used in this study.

Table 5
Outcomes ANOVA for the methodic principles based on four variables

	Age	Cultural background	Duration of participation	Girls Work approach
	F	*F*	*F*	*F*
Safety	6.67*	3.81 $_{ns}$	2.12 $_{ns}$	2.45 $_{ns}$
Meaningful relationship	4.77*	1.66 $_{ns}$	1.03 $_{ns}$	0.87 $_{ns}$
Acquaintance (Knowing)	19.20*	12.01*	10.10*	7.07*
Take into account the needs of girls	7.49*	1.69 $_{ns}$	0.64 $_{ns}$	8.31*
Positive motivation	10.36*	5.23**	1.59 $_{ns}$	6.87*
Boundaries	7.62*	14.08*	2.04 $_{ns}$	5.54*
Talking	4.94*	5.56**	4.50*	2.35 $_{ns}$
Expanding lifeworld	8.14*	22.47*	2.85**	5.63*

Note. * = Significant at $p < 0.010$; ** = Significant at $p < 0.050$; $_{ns}$ = Not Significant.

Table 6
Outcomes ANOVA for the methodic principles based on all four variables

	Age	Cultural background	Duration of participation	Approach of Girls Work
	F	*F*	*F*	*F*
Safety	5.25*	3.73 $_{ns}$	1.36 $_{ns}$	0.26 $_{ns}$
Meaningful relationship	2.20 $_{ns}$	0.06 $_{ns}$	0.96 $_{ns}$	0.36 $_{ns}$
Acquaintance (Knowing)	1.79 $_{ns}$	0.11 $_{ns}$	0.99 $_{ns}$	0.96 $_{ns}$
Take into account the needs of girls	1.45 $_{ns}$	0.06 $_{ns}$	1.07 $_{ns}$	1.76 $_{ns}$
Positive motivation	1.17 $_{ns}$	3.21 $_{ns}$	1.92 $_{ns}$	0.54 $_{ns}$
Boundaries	3.36 **	2.18 $_{ns}$	2.30 $_{ns}$	0.00 $_{ns}$
Talking	1.64 $_{ns}$	3.75 $_{ns}$	0.82 $_{ns}$	0.94 $_{ns}$
Expanding lifeworld	1.84 $_{ns}$	0.39 $_{ns}$	0.07 $_{ns}$	0.55 $_{ns}$

Note. * = Significant at $p < 0.010$; ** = Significant at $p < 0.050$; $_{ns}$ = Not Significant.

DISCUSSION

The present study sought to determine whether girls who participate in Girls Work recognize the methodic principles of Girls Work. The results suggest that the girls recognize all the methodic principles. In the introduction we argued that youth workers who work in Girls Work apply all the methodic principles, but how and when they apply them depends on different situations. This study confirms that of the nine methodic principles described for Girls Work, at least eight methodic principles are applied by the youth workers.

Some of the methodic principles are recognized more than others. The methodic principle 'talk' is recognized most by the girls, which suggests that girls have a lot of conversations with their youth worker and other girls. One of the youth workers in the masterclass explained that 'talk' is the 'engine of Girls Work', given how talking is important for getting to know the girls and how it contributes to how girls shape their lives. Another methodic principle which is widely recognized by the girls is 'safety'. The results suggest that girls feel safe to be themselves in Girls Work. This is important for girls, for it is only when they (or youth in general) feel safe in a specific context that they feel challenged to try (new) things so that they can learn from it, and also learn how to express themselves and their opinions (Denner, Meyer, & Bean, 2005; Jongepier, Struijk, & Van der Helm, 2010). As a result, girls acquire the skills and self-confidence to resist authorities and social inequalities (Denner et al., 2005). The methodic principle

'Meaningful relationship' is the third most recognized methodic principle. The results show that girls think they have a good relationship with their youth worker, which is very important for them. It is generally believed that a good relationship between youth and the social worker is very (or even the most) important for the success of a method (e.g. Banhoorn et al., 2013; Ince, Van Yperen, & Valkesteijn, 2013; Kelley, Bickman, & Norwood, 2010; Pijnenburg, 2010). Youth workers acknowledge the relevance of the relationship, because it ensures that girls trust the youth worker, it helps them to better express themselves and to open up to the youth worker, which makes them more responsive to the advice and support offered by the youth worker.

The methodic principle that girls recognize least is 'expanding lifeworld', which is about exposing girls to new experiences, possibilities and opportunities. Although girls recognize this methodic principle the least, they do still recognize it, suggesting that girls think their youth worker does focus on expanding the lifeworld of girls, but not as prominently as on other methodic principles. Most of the girls who recognized this methodic principle said that they did make new friends as a result of their participation in Girls Work. In some cases, girls also got to know new social contexts or realized new opportunities or possibilities. However, girls indicate this to a much lesser extent.

Since the methodic principles should be valid for a variety of methods, target groups, goals and contexts, our second research question was to investigate whether the degree to which girls recognize the methodic principles is influenced by variables pertaining to both the girls and to Girls Work. When considering the four variables of age, cultural background, duration of participation in Girls Work and the Girls Work approach, the results suggest that the methodic principles of 'safety' and 'boundaries' are recognized more by older girls. As for the methodic principle of safety, girls above the age of 18 recognized this more than girls between 10-14 years. We did not ask the girls whether their youth worker pays attention to the safety of girls or what the youth workers does to increase feelings of safety. Therefore, we could not conclude that there is less attention for feelings of safety with younger girls. A possible explanation for our findings is that girls above 18 years, because they are further ahead in their development, are more conscious of feelings of safety than girls between 10-14 years. The methodic principle of 'boundaries' is also recognized more by girls above 18 years. This suggests that girls above 18 years know better what their own boundaries are, how to indicate their boundaries to others and are better aware of accepted behavior. The youth workers in the masterclass explained that girls above 18 years who participate in Girls

Work have more problems in their lives than younger girls. A possible explanation for this result could be that girls above 18 years have more problems with knowing and indicating their boundaries, which causes youth workers to focus on this more with them than with younger girls.

Finally, no other significant differences between the age of girls and the methodic principles were found. This suggests that the other methodic principles are being applied equally for girls in different age groups. The results also revealed no differences between the methodic principles and the girls' cultural background, duration of participation in Girls Work, or the Girls Work approach. The idea behind the methodic principles is that they should be applied in Girls Work, irrespective of differences in the girls' background and the Girls Work approach (Metz & Sonneveld, 2018). This study confirms the use of these methodic principles in Girls Work.

Limitations of the study

There are several limitations worth noting. First, respondents were asked whether they recognized the methodic principles in their Girls Work activity or youth worker. Our research did not include data about the actual occurrence of the methodic principle. To validate our findings, we would suggest further research such as observing actual practice or following a group of youth workers during a period of time in which they keep track of when and how methodic principles are applied.

Based on the factor analysis and reliability analysis, we had to exclude some items. As a result, the methodic principles of safety, talk and expanding lifeworld were measured using only one item. Since all the methodic principles include multiple factors, these three methodic principles were measured on a fairly narrow basis (e.g. the methodic principle of expanding lifeworld consists of exploring new contexts, learning opportunities, receiving new information, use of role models etc. In this study, girls were only asked about exploring new contexts).

Lastly, this study only focused on the experience of girls participating in Girls Work activities in the Netherlands. The findings of this study cannot simply be generalized to other countries, as Girls Work may well be conceived and/or arranged differently in other countries. Therefore, it would be interesting to conduct this study in other countries.

Conclusion

The current study contributes to our understanding of the methodic actions of the youth worker in contact with the target group, summarized in methodic principles. Prior research has identified nine methodic principles which are specific for the Girls Work method. By applying these nine methodic principles, the youth worker enables a process through which girls can develop their ability to shape their own lives (see also Boomkens, Metz, Schalk, & Van Regenmortel, 2019a). The methodic principles therefore seem to offer an appropriate approach to substantiating the Girls Work method. However, current knowledge about the methodic principles was only based on the experience and vision of the youth workers. The perspective of the target group – girls who participate in Girls Work – was not included. This article examines the degree to which girls recognize these methodic principles. This study reveals that girls recognize all the methodic principles, apart from 'use of social context' which was not measured correctly. This suggests that all youth workers who work in Girls Work indeed apply these methodic principles. The methodic principle of *expanding lifeworld* is recognized least by the girls, and the ones who did recognize this say they made new friends. However, this methodic principle includes more than that. Based on this study, we would therefore suggest that youth workers should focus more on exposing the girls to experiences, possibilities and opportunities which they were formerly unfamiliar.

This study also confirms that the methodic principles are applied irrespective of the girls' ages and cultural background, how long they have participated in Girls Work, and the particular Girls Work approach. This suggests that these methodic principles can indeed be applied to describe the methodic actions of the youth worker within the broad practice of Girls Work. However, the age of girls appeared to cause some differences in two methodic principles: safety and boundaries. Therefore, youth workers who work in Girls Work should be more aware of applying these methodic principles when working with younger girls.

Chapter **5**

The Girls Work method: what is the role of empowerment in building girls' agency?

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INTRODUCTION

Youth work in Europe has become more oriented on personal development of young people and policy on youth work has moved towards more evidence-based youth work (Dunne, Ulicna, Murphy, & Golubeva, 2014). Because of this, older models of youth work are being questioned and new theoretical models emerge. This is also the case for Girls Work in the Netherlands, as one of the methods of youth work that focuses on girls between 10 and 23 years. Youth workers who work with girls indicate that they need a (new) model of Girls Work, which is substantiated with theory and empirical data. In previous research, we therefore examined the goal of Girls Work, what youth workers do in contact with girls and how we can theoretically substantiate this (De Boer & Metz, 2012, 2014; Metz, 2016; Boomkens, Rauwerdink-Nijland, Van der Grient, Van Trijp, & Metz, 2018). Based on that, we described the new model for Girls Work in which we hypothesized that the actions of the youth workers (methodic principles) contribute to the aim of Girls Work (shaping their own lives, also understood as agency). This contribution is mediated through empowerment (see also Figure 1). With the present study, we want to empirical test this hypothesis. First, we further operationalize the model of Girls Work.

Girls Work in the Netherlands focuses on supporting girls between 10 and 23 years old with their identity development, so that they are better able to shape their own lives on their way to adulthood (Batsleer, 2013; De Boer & Metz, 2012, 2014; Gemmeke et al., 2011; Van der Zande, 1991). Most girls succeed with this themselves or with the support of their social contexts. However, there is a (growing) group of girls who need support from professionals because they face one or more forms of vulnerability, e.g. they live in a stressful home situation or in poverty, are confronted with abuse, are being bullied or discriminated, have problems at school, or have a disability (cognitive, mental, social or physical) (Abdallah, 2017). Girls Work in the Netherlands is carried out by paid youth workers who have completed a formal education (Metz, 2017) and is positioned in the leisure time of girls (Dunne et al., 2014; Haidinger, Kasper, Knecht, Kuchler, & Atzmüller, 2016; Metz, 2011b). The reason for having gender-specific youth work is the under-representation of girls in regular youth work activities (approximately 10–30% of the youth in these activities are girls) (Gemmeke et al., 2011). This is due to the dominance of boys through their more extrovert behavior, because activities do not always appeal to girls, and because parents and caregivers do not always allow girls to participate because of safety concerns (e.g. because the activities are offered in an unfamiliar neighborhood or because boys are present) (De Boer & Metz, 2014;

Van Drenth & Te Poel, 1991). Girls Work is an open approach method, which "involves professional interventions with a goal-oriented, process-based, moral and dialogical character" (Donkers, as cited by Metz, 2016, p. 51). There are two types of Girls Work (Van der Grient & Metz, 2018): the group approach and the individual approach. When working with a group, the group usually consists of a fairly fixed group of girls (usually around 8–12 girls) who meet each other for a certain amount of time. In addition to group activities, youth workers can also offer individual support. The choice for one or both approaches "depends on the individual girl's needs, the context, the organization and the assignment of the municipality" (Van der Grient & Metz, 2018, p. 2).

As mentioned previously, the aim of Girls Work is to guide and support girls in their identity development, so that they, as adults, can shape their lives. In previous research on Girls Work, we theoretically understood this aim as agency (Boomkens & Metz, 2015). Agency has many operationalization's, such as people's ability to act (Campbell, 2009; Charrad, 2010; Gillespie, 2012; Han, Nicholas, Aimer, & Gray, 2015; Philips, 2013), to act on behalf of what matters to people (Alkire, 2005; Drydyk, 2013) or to intentionally do things and to make purposeful choices about their lives (Bandura, 2001; Chirkov, 2011; Goldberg & Crespo, 2003; Maynard & Stuart, 2018; Meesters, 2018; Paternoster & Pogarsky, 2009; Samman & Santos, 2009). Others also include the power of individuals to influence their own life course (Elder, 1998; Hutchison, 2005; Pollack, 2000; Swartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005; Stuart, 2014). However, for theoretically understanding the aim of Girls Work, we use the operationalization of Bandura (2006), because it refers to the human capacity to consciously influence one's own functioning and living conditions. Within Girls Work, youth workers are trying to support girls so that girls know better what they want in their lives (they act more consciously) and to help them to actually achieve it (to influence their own lives).

Bandura (2006) highlights four core properties of agency (also described – but not named – by other researchers), that help youth workers to better translate this theoretical concept to their practice. The first property is *intentionality* and refers to the freedom of doing what one wants and making purposeful choices (Borovoy & Ghodsee, 2012; Samman & Santos, 2009). The property of *forethought* involves setting realistic goals and anticipating likely outcomes (Bandura, 2006). Borovoy and Ghodsee (2012) emphasize that women, more than men, compare what they want and what the consequences of their actions could be. The next property is *self-reactiveness* which refers to the phase where the intentions are converted into actions (Bandura, 2006). This is emphasized

by most researchers as an important part of agency (Charrad, 2010; McMunn, Bartley, & Kuh, 2006; Pollack, 2000; Tang & Anderson, 1999). Finally, *self-reflection* refers to how people reflect on their thoughts and actions (Bandura, 2006). When people reflect on their thoughts and actions, they can develop a clear understanding of themselves and the world around them (Tang & Anderson, 1999). The theory of agency suggests that all four properties should be present in order to shape one's own life as adults.

The development of agency is influenced by the process of empowerment (Alkire, 2005; Boomkens, Rauwerdink-Nijland, Van der Grient, Van Trijp, & Metz, 2018; Maynard & Stuart, 2018). Empowerment is a highly debated concept, and many different operationalization's occur (Baumans, 2012; Maynard & Stuart, 2017). However, it has often been defined as "a mechanism by which people, groups, and communities gain control over their affairs" (Rappaport, 1987, p. 122). Translated to Girls Work: when youth workers focus on girls' empowerment, they focus on strengthening girls to make them more capable to shape their own lives. Much of the research on empowerment focus on psychological empowerment (Christens, Peterson, & Speer, 2011), which refers to empowerment at the individual level (Zimmerman, 1995). This emphasis on the individual does not mean that other contextual factors are overlooked, but the individual level influence and is being influenced by empowerment at the organizational and community levels (Zimmerman, 1995). Because Girls Work focuses merely on the individual as well (and takes into account how girls are being influenced and influence their social contexts), we choose to use the process of psychological empowerment in our study.

Psychological empowerment consists of three components: intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral components (Zimmerman, 1995). The *intrapersonal component* refers to people's own perception of personal control (Delahaij, 2004; Zimmerman, 1995). This consists of self-efficacy beliefs, motivation and the perception of personal control, or the 'locus of control' (Delahaij, 2004). The *interactional component* is more about the actual ability of an individual to exercise control. Central within the interactional component is learning to understand the context, to develop an awareness of possibilities to achieve goals (Zimmerman, 1995) and to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills needed to achieve goals (Delahaij, 2004). Last, the *behavioral component* refers to the actual action by which people gain more control over their own lives (Zimmerman, 1995). Participation is the core principle here. Through participation people (a) can directly

influence the environment, (b) learn new skills, (c) increase the social context and (d) strengthen the sense of personal control.

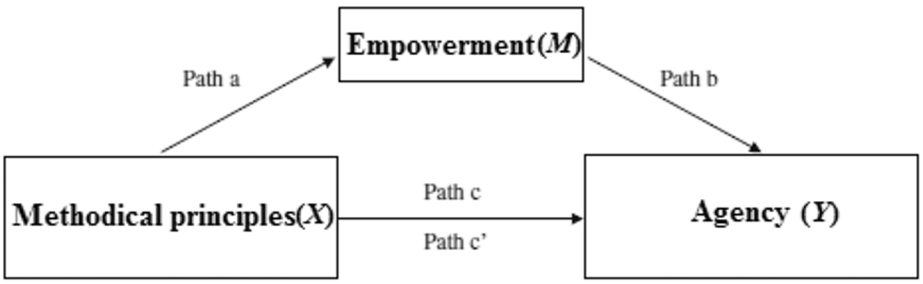
The psychological level of empowerment may be able to explain the processes by which girls acquire agency (Boomkens & Metz, 2015). This relation between agency and empowerment has been described theoretically by other researchers, although they do not always explicitly use the concepts of agency and empowerment. Donald, Koolwal, Annan, Falb and Goldstein (2017) have described the link between agency and personal control (the first component of empowerment). They state that in order to become an agent, "individuals need to perceive an own sense of control" (p. 6). They also state that people's agency is influenced by the resources available to the individual and how the individual interacts with them." (p. 6; known as the interactional component in empowerment theory). Several researchers state that to achieve agency, participation (part of the last component of empowerment) is an important step (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; Christens et al., 2011; Lyons, Smuts, & Stephens, 2001; Prestby, Wandersman, Florin, Rich, & Chavis, 1990; Rich, Edelstein, Hallman, & Wandersman, 1995; Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, & Checkoway, 1992). Although the relation between agency and empowerment has been described frequently, these associations have not been tested for significance as an indirect effect. Also, the amount of research on the development of agency within Girls Work remains limited.

In our previous research on Girls Work in the Netherlands, we identified nine so-called methodic principles to describe the methodical actions of the youth worker in interaction with girls (De Boer & Metz, 2014). The methodic principles were identified though Program Evaluation (Metz, 2016), which focus on the construction of a valid description of a social program, in ways that are in line with scientific standards and applicable in practice (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). To determine what the actions of youth workers in contact with girls are, focus groups and individual interviews were conducted in a previous study with youth workers who work with girls (De Boer & Metz, 2014). The results were presented to these and other youth workers for validation, which resulted in the use of nine methodic principles. These principles – some of which are specifically for working with girls or have a gender-specific interpretation – can be applied separately or in conjunction according to the situation, goals, persons and resources available for the given working methods, target groups, goals and contexts (Metz, 2016). The nine methodic principles are: Safety (girls need to feel safe to be or to explore who they are in the Girls Work activity), Meaningful relationship (the

relationship between the girl(s) and the youth worker should be important enough to make a difference in their lives), Acquaintance (the youth worker really knows a girl/the girls), Take into account the needs of girls (the youth workers are meeting the needs of every girl), Positive motivation (focusing on the positive actions/behavior by girls instead of on punishment for bad behavior), Boundaries (to make girls aware of generally accepted behavior and how their behavior affects others), Expanding lifeworld (exposing girls to new experiences and social opportunities), Talk (talking refers to the many and easy ways that girls talk and the role that talking plays in their development) and Use of social context (the youth worker draws on people, networks, organizations and facilities that can contribute to the girls' development). The identification of the nine methodic principles is based on the practice knowledge of youth workers. Much remains unknown about the contribution of these principles to the aim of Girls Work.

It is hypothesized that with these nine methodic principles, the youth worker facilitates a process through which girls can develop agency: the ability of individuals to shape their own life, in relation to their own values and in alignment with their own social context (see also Boomkens & Metz, 2015). The present study addressed these research needs by examining the relationships between the methodic principles and girls' agency. This study considers a main mediation model in which we hypothesize that the methodic principles contribute, through the empowerment process, to the agency of vulnerable girls (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Main Mediation Model.



METHODS

Design

We used a cross-sectional design to explore whether girls' agency is influenced by the methodic principles, and whether this influence is mediated by empowerment. The research was performed in close collaboration with eight youth work providers in urban and rural areas in the Netherlands. They opened their practice for data collection and arranged at least two youth workers to participate in a masterclass, and two girls to participate in the girls group. The masterclass and the girls group consist of experienced youth workers (working with girls) and girls (who have participated in Girls Work for at least two years). Both groups helped to develop the questionnaire and protocol for data collection. This collaboration ensured that the research methods were appropriate to the Girls Work practice (Metz, 2016).

We consulted the masterclass to examine whether the items met the criteria of agency, empowerment and the methodic principles, which resulted in some changes to the scale. The girls group was consulted to present the scale to check the following conditions: comprehension of the questions, attractiveness and duration. We also tested the scale twice with four different girls of the girls group, which led to minor adjustments. They were treated to a goody bag and a group dinner in return for their participation.

Sample and procedure

The eight youth work providers selected approximately 80 Girls Work activities in urban and rural areas in the Netherlands to participate in this study, based on the dispersion of their target group (e.g. girls of different ages, cultural backgrounds, education) and their Girls Work activities (e.g. different types of Girls Work activities, new and older activities). Data collection was cancelled at 28 activities for a variety of reasons: e.g. sickness of the youth worker or participant, problems with public transportation due to weather conditions, a fight between the girls, and too much pressure on a youth worker involved in multiple selected activities. This led to a total of 52 Girls Work activities that were visited between November 2016 and February 2017. Girls filled out an online questionnaire during regular Girls Work activities. Only when no internet was available, girls were offered the opportunity to fill out a paper version of the questionnaire. The youth worker was absent during the survey to reduce response bias. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents were offered a certificate and a wristband with the text 'girls run the world' after finishing the questionnaire.

All girls who were present on the day of data collection were asked to participate in the research. Of the 632–676 girls who participated in these activities, 435 girls completed the questionnaire (response rate of approximately 65%). In 39 cases, the online questionnaire failed to yield any answers because the participant did not press 'send' or because of an instable Wi-Fi connection. Finally, we excluded 3 respondents who were younger than 10 years old, which led to the final sample of 393 girls (response rate of approximately 58%). The mean age of the sample was 13.68 years old (*SD* = 3.27). Although 92% were born in the Netherlands, 74% had a mixed cultural background; 72.5% of the girls lived with both parents and 20.1% lived with one parent. Other participants lived: alone (1.3%), 'I have no permanent residence' (1.3%), with another relative (1.0%), in sheltered living (1.0%), with a partner (0.8%) or with friends (0.5%). From the girls attending secondary school, 72% followed vocational education and (Dutch: VMBO) 28% higher education (Dutch: HAVO/VWO). Most girls in our sample participated in Girls Work once a week (57.5%). 20.9% participated in Girls Work more than once a week and 21.1% did so less than once a week.

The data collection was conducted by the researcher and by students of social work education of different applied universities. The students were trained by the researcher before collecting the data. This training included attention to their attitude towards the girls and youth worker, rules for data collection (e.g. girls younger than 10 or older than 23 were not eligible to participate, the youth worker had to be out of the room), instructions regarding the questionnaire (questions and digital environment) and confidentiality. Students received credits for their assignment (e.g. thesis or portfolio).

Measures

For this study, we used three self-constructed scales to measure agency, empowerment and the methodic principles of the Girls Work method. Since we wanted to measure the concept of agency as defined by Bandura (2006), we developed the scale ourselves (see also Boomkens, Metz, Van Regenmortel, & Schalk, 2019b). We operationalized Bandura's agency in terms of the four properties: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflection. We also constructed a scale to measure empowerment (see Appendix C), because available scales were either too long (e.g. Akey, Marquis, & Ross, 2000), did not measure all three components of psychological empowerment (e.g. Teeuw, Schwarzer, & Jerusalem, 1994), or items were too generally operationalized (e.g. Israel, Checkoway, Schulz, & Zimmerman, 1994).

Table 1
Construction of the scale and subscales of agency and empowerment

	Variance explained	α	Number of items	Minimum - maximum
Agency: total	-	.833	13	1 – 5
Intentionality	25.2%	.813	4	1 – 5
Forethought	11.1%	.748	4	1 – 5
Self-reactiveness	10.5%	.760	3	1 – 5
Self-reflection	7.5%	.753	2	1 – 5
Empowerment: total	-	.826	17	1 – 5
Personal control	33.5%	.766	7	1 – 5
Critical awareness	10.8%	.799	6	1 – 5
Participation	7.3%	.744	4	1 – 5

Items were measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1 representing 'strongly disagree' to 5 representing 'strongly agree'. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis (principal component analysis and direct oblimin rotation) of the responses of the 393 respondents to determine the validity of the two scales. We examined all the factors evident when the eigenvalues are >1. Four of the factors were directly related to the four properties of agency, and three of the factors were directly related to the three components of empowerment (see Table 1). To measure agency as a whole, we used 13 items (α = .833) and to measure empowerment as a whole, we used 17 items (α = .826).

To measure the methodic principles of the Girls Work method, we developed a scale ourselves (see Appendix C) because the methodic principles for Girls Work can only be identified and substantiated through practice knowledge (Metz, 2016), therefore no scales are available to measure these methodic principles. We first operationalized the nine methodic principles in a way that girls could indicate whether they experienced the presence of each methodic principle. Next, we consulted the masterclass to check whether the items were still in line with the methodic principles. Due to an error in the software, we could not measure the principle 'use of social context' correctly. Therefore we decided to leave this principle out of the analysis. The final scale consisted of 27 items which were measured on a four-point scale or on a five-point scale. We made Z-scores for all the items measuring the methodic principles and conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (principal component analysis and direct oblimin rotation) where five of the methodic principles were divided into five different factors. The methodic principle

of 'positive motivation' partially overlaps with 'meaningful relationship', especially the items that involve the actions of the youth worker. As youth workers propose to differentiate between these methodic principles (De Boer & Metz, 2014), we chose to leave these items with 'positive motivation'. The methodic principles of 'talking individual', 'talking in groups' and 'expanding lifeworld' overlap. We chose to measure these principles individually, based on one item. Cronbach's alpha was .93 for all the methodic principles together (see Table 2).

Table 2
Construction of the scale and subscales

	α	Number of items
Methodic principles: total	.93	29
Safety	-	1
Meaningful relationship	.84	4
Acquaintance (Knowing)	.89	4
Take into account the needs of girls	.71	2
Positive motivation	.75	6
Boundaries	.89	9
Talk individual	-	1
Talk in groups	-	1
Expanding lifeworld	-	1

Analysis

The analyses were conducted using SPSS PASW Statistics 18 for descriptive analysis and Hayes (2013) PROCESS macro for IBM SPSS (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) for mediation analyses to empirically examine the impact of both the independent variable and mediator variable (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). To test the indirect effects of the methodic principles and empowerment to agency, we used a bootstrapping approach with 5000 resamples. Bootstrapping is a non-parametric method used to estimate indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Since age is a strong predictor of agency (Boomkens, Metz, Van Regenmortel, & Schalk, 2019b), we controlled the mediation analyses for age. We also controlled the mediation for the duration of participation in Girls Work.

Ethical considerations

This research is carried out in line with the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice (VSNU, 2014). For example, the managers of all the youth work providers who

participated in this study had approved the data collection. The girls and their parents (especially when girls were younger than 16 years old) were informed about the study by the youth worker by means of a letter. Also, posters were hung in that spaces or hallways of all the participating activities, to make sure that all the parents and girls were informed about the study. All material were provided to the youth workers by the researchers. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all the girls and their parents were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study prior to the data collection, on the day itself or even during the study. We ensured anonymity of all the girls and the Girls Work activities they attended, since no questions were asked from which the origin could be guided. Also, all students who supported in the data collection had to sign a confidentially form before they could visit the Girls Work activities. The researchers declare that they have no conflict of interest.

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses

Correlation analyses between the three concepts showed that empowerment and the methodic principles were significantly and positively correlated to agency of girls (r = .5724, p = <.001; r = .472, p = <.001 respectively). The concepts were tested for multicollinearity using the variance inflation factor (VIF). The VIF indicates whether the independent variables have a strong linear relationship with the dependent variable (Myers, 1990 in Field, 2009). Because all the VIF values were below 10.0 (1.429), multicollinearity was not an issue in this study.

Table 3.
Descriptive statistics for the full sample and separately by age.

	M (SD)
Agency: total	3.85 (0.53)
Intentionality	4.00 (0.79)
Forethought	3.85 (0.69)
Self-reactiveness	3.96 (0.71)
Self-reflection	3.54 (0.87)
Empowerment: total	3.79 (0.54)
Personal control	3.93 (0.61)
Critical awareness	3.77 (0.67)
Participation	3.58 (0.78)

Agency and empowerment

Table 3 provides descriptive statistics on agency and empowerment. The girls assigned a score for the level of agency with a mean of 3.85 (*SD* = 0.54), ranging between 2.14 (minimum) and 5.00 (maximum). For empowerment, the girls assigned a score with a mean of 3.79 (*SD* = 0.54), ranging between 1.59 (minimum) and 5.00 (maximum).

Mediation model

To examine whether the methodic principles positively affect girls' agency, and whether this effect is mediated through empowerment, we used a mediation analysis. We tested three possible models of mediation. The first model tested the mediation of the three concepts as a whole (the eight methodic principles combined, empowerment as a whole and agency as a whole). Only when this model confirms the mediation, we will test the other two models in which we take a closer look at (1) each of the four properties of agency to examine whether the methodic principles influence on or more property more than others and (2) each of the methodic principle to investigate whether a specific methodic principle plays a more important role than others.

Model 1. Mediation of the methodic principles on agency, through empowerment

The first model tested the indirect effects of the methodic principles altogether and of empowerment on agency (see Table 4). Results indicated that the methodic principles are a significant predictor of empowerment, and that empowerment is a significant predictor of agency. The methodic principles are also a significant predictor of agency. These results indicated that the indirect coefficient is significant, suggesting a partial mediation of the methodic principles on agency. In other words, the methodic principles contribute to girls' agency. This contribution is partially mediated by empowerment. However, this mediation only occurred when all three components were included.

Table 4.
Direct and indirect effects of the methodic principles on agency through empowerment

	R2	Path a		Path b		Path c		Path c'		a x b	95% CI
		B	*SE*	B	*SE*	B	*SE*	B	*SE*		
X→M→Y	.40***	.53***	.04	.47***	.05	.14***	.04	.14**	.04	.25	.19, .32[a]

Note. CI = Confidence interval.
*** p <.001; ** p <.01; * p <.05
[a] Bias-corrected confidence interval does not overlap with zero

The age of the girls and the duration of participation in Girls Work were inserted in the model as control variables. Older girls reported a significant higher level of agency than younger girls (*B* = .13, *SE* = .03, *p* = .001). Also, the duration of participation in Girls Work was positively associated with agency (*B* = .05, *SE* = .02, *p* = .009). However, these effects did not influence the mediation model, which indicate that both the age of girls and the duration of participation in Girls Work has no influence on the effects of the methodic principles on agency, through empowerment.

Model 2. Mediation of the methodic principles on each of the four properties of agency, through empowerment

The second model tested whether the eight methodic principles influence each of the four properties of girls' agency individually, again through the mediation of empowerment. Results indicated that empowerment is a significant predictor of each of the properties of agency (see Table 5). The methodic principles are a significant predictor for two of the four properties of agency (forethought (Y2) and self-reflectiveness (Y4)). The methodic principles are not a significant predictor for the properties intentionality (Y1) and self-reactiveness (Y3). The results indicated that the indirect coefficient is significant for all properties of agency. This means that if we look at the four properties of agency individually, empowerment is a partial mediation of the methodic principles on forethought and self-reflectiveness. The influence of the methodic principles on the other two properties (intentionality and self-reactiveness) is fully mediated through empowerment.

Table 5
Direct and Indirect Effects of the Methodic principles on the Properties of Agency

	R2	Path a		Path b		Path c		Path c'		a x b	95% CI
		B	*SE*	B	*SE*	B	*SE*	B	*SE*		
X→*M*→*Y1*	.29***	.53***	.04	.40***	.07	.35***	.06	.14	.07	.21	.12, .32[a]
X→*M*→*Y2*	.15***			.36***	.07	.34***	.06	.15*	.06	.19	.11, .29[a]
X→*M*→*Y3*	.27***			.68***	.07	.36***	.06	.00	.07	.36	.26, .48[a]
X→*M*→*Y4*	.19***			.49***	.09	.52***	.07	.26**	.08	.26	.15, .38[a]

Note. CI = Confidence interval.
*** *p* <.001; ** *p* <.01; * *p* <.05
[a] Bias-corrected confidence interval does not overlap with zero

Model 3. Mediation of each of the methodic principles on agency, through empowerment

The third of model tested whether each of the eight methodic principles influences girls' agency as a whole, through the mediation of empowerment. All of the methodic principles proved to be significant predictors for empowerment (see Table 6). Five of the nine methodic principles are not a significant predictor for agency. However, we did find significant indirect effects of all the methodic principles and empowerment on agency. In other words, agency is fully mediated though empowerment by the methodic principles 'Acquaintance' (X3), 'Positive motivation' (X5), 'Expanding lifeworld' (X7), and 'Talking' (both individual (X8) and in groups (X9)). Agency is partially mediated through empowerment by the methodic principles 'Safety' (X1), 'Meaningful relationship' (X2), 'Take into account the needs of girls' (X4), and 'Boundaries' (X6).

Table 6
Direct and Indirect Effects of the Nine Methodic principles on Agency

	R2	Path a		Path b		Path c		Path c'		a x b	95% CI
		B	*SE*	B	*SE*	B	*SE*	B	*SE*		
(*X1*)→*M*→*Y*	.39***	.09**	.03	.54***	.04	.10***	.02	.05*	.02	.05	.02, .09[a]
(*X2*)→*M*→*Y*	.40***	.30***	.03	.50***	.04	.22***	.03	.07*	.03	.15	.11, .20[a]
(*X3*)→*M*→*Y*	.39***	.20***	.03	.55***	.04	.12***	.03	.01	.03	.11	.07, .15[a]
(*X4*)→*M*→*Y*	.40***	.28***	.03	.49***	.04	.22***	.03	.08**	.03	.14	.10, .18[a]
(*X5*)→*M*→*Y*	.39***	.40***	.04	.52***	.04	.26***	.04	.05	.04	.21	.16, .27[a]
(*X6*)→*M*→*Y*	.40***	.32***	.03	.49***	.04	.25***	.03	.09**	.03	.16	.11, .21[a]
(*X7*)→*M*→*Y*	.39***	.13***	.03	.54***	.04	.10***	.03	.03	.02	.07	.04, .10[a]
(*X8*)→*M*→*Y*	.38***	.08**	.03	.55***	.04	.06	.03	.01	.02	.05	.01, .08[a]
(*X9*)→*M*→*Y*	.38***	.15***	.03	.54***	.04	.09***	.03	.01	.02	.08	.05, .12[a]

Note. CI = Confidence interval.
*** p <.001; ** p <.01; * p <.05
[a] Bias-corrected confidence interval does not overlap with zero

DISCUSSION

Youth workers state that Girls Work offers girls in vulnerable circumstances the opportunity to develop agency. This study has found a significant relationship between the methodic principles of Girls Work and the level of agency of girls who participate in Girls Work. Eight methodic principles are positively related to agency, suggesting that

what youth workers do in interaction with these girls indeed contributes to how girls manage to shape their own lives.

This study has furthermore yielded insight into the potential mechanisms underlying the contribution of the methodic principles to girls' agency. The present study supports an indirect effect model in which empowerment mediates the link between the methodic principles and agency. More specifically, the methodic principles of Girls Work contribute to the empowerment process of girls and young women. The empowerment process in turn contributes to the level of agency of girls. The findings confirm the importance of focusing on empowerment in professional Girls Work as a way to support the development of agency by girls and young women living in vulnerable circumstances. When focusing on the four properties of agency, we found that the girls' levels of intentionality and self-reactiveness are fully mediated by empowerment. The properties of forethought and self-reflection are partially mediated by empowerment, suggesting that the methodic principles also have a direct influence on these properties of agency. Could this be explained by the characteristics of the properties? While forethought and self-reflection involve contemplating actions and processes, the properties of intentionality and self-reactiveness focus on actually aiming for and doing what girls want in their lives, and may therefore require more power. To experience an intention and to actually do what they intend, girls need to believe in themselves, they need to develop a critical awareness, and they need to participate (be empowered). Further research should focus on this question.

We found that five of the nine methodic principles are fully mediated by empowerment, which suggests that these principles contribute to how girls develop agency only indirectly. The methodic principles that contribute to agency indirectly are acquaintance, positive motivation, expanding lifeworld and talk (both individual and in groups). This suggests that these principles are specific for supporting the empowerment process, which in turn is important for the development of agency. The other four methodic principles are partially mediated by empowerment. These principles – safety, meaningful relationship, take into account the needs of girls and boundaries – have a positive influence on both the empowerment process and the development of agency. Despite the relationship between the girls' ages and their level of agency, the findings in this study are consistent for girls of all ages. This shows that, besides the development of agency associated with age, methodological principles of Girls Work can also play

an important role. The duration of participation in Girls Work does not influence this mediation model.

In the literature on agency and empowerment, these two concepts are sometimes linked together (Christens et al., 2011; Donald et al., 2017; Lyons et al., 2001; Rich et al., 1995; Zimmerman et al., 1992), although some of these studies do not explicitly use Bandura's concept of agency or Rappaport's concept of empowerment. For instance, Donald et al. (2017) describe the link between personal control (first component of empowerment) and critical awareness (second component of empowerment) and agency, while Rich et al. (1995) focus on the link between participation and agency. In this study, we confirmed the relations between the components of empowerment and agency. However, it is hypothesized that to generate empowerment all three components – personal control, critical awareness and participation – are necessary (Boomkens et al., 2018; Eisman et al., 2016; Rodriguez, Menezes, Ferreira, 2017; Steenssens, Van Regenmortel, & Schalk, 2017; Zimmerman, 1995). Our study findings confirm the importance of focusing on all three components to help girls shape their own lives, as the indirect effects only showed up when all three components were included in the model.

Limitations of the study

There are a number of limitations worth noting. First, respondents were asked whether they perceived the operation of the methodic principles in their Girls Work activity or youth worker. It is possible that respondents who did perceive the methodic principles are more self-conscious and therefore score higher on the level of agency.

Another limitation of this study is the cross-sectional design, which makes it difficult to infer causality. However, since both concepts are dynamic and subject to change we wanted to explore how girls perceive their level of agency and empowerment at that point in time. Future research should focus on this effect using a longitudinal design.

Third, agency is defined as the ability of individuals to shape their own lives, in relation to their own values and in alignment with their own social context. In our operationalization, we did not ask the girls about the influence of their social context. Furthermore, because of an error in the software, we could not interrogate the girls about if and how their youth worker uses their social context to help them shape their own lives. Therefore, further research should focus on understanding how the social context of these girls influences their ability to shape their own lives.

Last, this study only focused on girls who participate in Girls Work activities in the Netherlands. Since the Netherlands is just one welfare state that offers professional youth work, it would be interesting to find out whether these findings also apply to professional Girls Work in other welfare states. It could be, however, that Girls Work is conceived and/or arranged differently in other countries.

Conclusion

This paper points out the importance for youth workers to focus on the empowerment of girls to help them develop their agency. The methodic principles of the Girls Work method contribute to the agency of girls in vulnerable circumstances. This contribution is mediated through empowerment. The study also confirms that to generate empowerment, all three components – personal control, critical awareness and participation – are necessary.

We also found that at least eight of the nine methodic principles are important in helping girls shape their own lives. We found two groups of methodic principles, which contribute to agency in a different way. The first group contributes both directly to agency and indirectly through empowerment. These are safety, meaningful relationship, take into account the needs of girls and boundaries. The second group of methodic principles only contributes to agency indirectly through empowerment. These are acquaintance, positive motivation, expanding lifeworld and talking (both individual and in groups). The last methodic principle – use of social context – could not be included in this study. Further research to determine how this methodic principle contributes to agency is required.

Appendix C

Girls Work Empowerment Scale (original in Dutch).

We have developed this scale to measure empowerment within girls between 10 and 23 years, who participate in professional Girls Work in the Netherlands.

	Strongly disagree	Mildly disagree	Neither agree appen nor disagree	Mildly agree	Strongly agree
Personal Control					
I believe in myself					
I believe that I have the power to change something in a positive way					
I believe that I can achieve everything that I want					
When I fail to achieve something, that is mostly someone else's fault					
I am motivated to do whatever I think is important / to be myself					
I am motivated to handle situations that I want to change					
I am motivated to work on my future					
Critical Awareness					
I am searching for possibilities in my own context to work on things I want to achieve					
I am searching for new possibilities in new contexts to work on something I want to achieve					
I am searching for new information that I need to achieve what I want					
I know who can ask for help, when I want to do/achieve something					
I am learning new skills, so i can do/achieve what I want					
I become aware of the skills that I already possess					
Participation					
I am practicing what I want to do/achieve in the Girls Work activity					
I am practicing what I want to do/achieve outside of the Girls Work activity					
Within the Girls Work activity, I am actually working on what I want to do/achieve					
Outside of the Girls Work activity, I am actually working on what I want to do/achieve					

Perceived Methodical Principles of Girls Work (original in Dutch).

We have developed this scale to measure whether girls between 10 and 23 years, who participate in professional Girls Work in the Netherlands, recognize the methodical principles of Girls Work.

	Scale
Safety	
I feel safe when I participate in the Girls Work activity	4 point Likert-scale
Meaningful relationship	
I think the youth worker trusts me	5 point Likert-scale
I trust the youth worker	5 point Likert-scale
I take seriously what the youth worker says to me, even if I'm not happy about it	5 point Likert-scale
My youth worker understands me	5 point Likert-scale
Acquaintance	
My youth worker knows my personal situation	5 point Likert-scale
My youth worker knows what I am good at (my talents)	5 point Likert-scale
My youth worker knows what I am less good at	5 point Likert-scale
My youth worker knows what I need / what suits me	5 point Likert-scale
Take into account the needs of girls	
For me, the Girls Work activity is a place where I find what I need	5 point Likert-scale
For me, the Girls Work activity is a place where I can work on my (personal) goals	5 point Likert-scale
Positive motivation	
During the Girls Work activity there is (positive) attention for who I am, what I can do or what I do	4 point Likert-scale
Indicate how much attention the following people have for you: - My youth worker - Other girls in the Girls Work activity - Others, such as volunteers	5 point Likert-scale (with an option 'does not apply')
My youth worker appreciates what I do or what I can do (gives compliments, for example)	5 point Likert-scale
My youth worker appreciates what we do or can do as a group (perform)	5 point Likert-scale

	Scale
Boundaries	
Because of the rules drawn up in the Girls Work activity, it is clear how we deal with each other	5 point Likert-scale
Because of the rules drawn up in the Girls Work activity, I learn to better understand the world around me	5 point Likert-scale
Because of the rules drawn up in the Girls Work activity, I manage to participate	5 point Likert-scale
My youth worker encourages me to indicate what I like and what I do not like?	5 point Likert-scale
Because my youth worker encourages me to indicate my own limits I manage to better indicate what I like and do not like	5 point Likert-scale
Because my youth worker encourages me to indicate my own limits I also manage to indicate in other places what I like and dislike	5 point Likert-scale
Because my youth worker encourages me to indicate my own limits, I take into account what others do and do not like	5 point Likert-scale
Because my youth worker encourages me to indicate my own limits, I learn that I can do something myself	5 point Likert-scale
Because my youth worker encourages me to indicate my own limits, I believe (more) in myself	5 point Likert-scale
Expanding lifeworld	
Do you become acquainted with new environments (such as new places, new people or new agencies) through your youth worker?	4 point Likert-scale
Talk	
Do you have individual conversations (1-on-1) with your youth worker? (talking individual)	4 point Likert-scale
Do you take part in group discussions during the Girls Work activity (with other girls)? (Talking in group)	4 point Likert-scale

Items were measured on either a 4 point Likert-scale or a 5 point Likert-scale:

4 point Likert-scale: 1= never; 2 = sometimes; 3 = often; 4 = always

5 point Likert-scale: 1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= Neither agree nor disagree; 4= agree; 5= strongly agree.

5

Chapter **6**

The role of social contexts in acquiring agency in Girls Work

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INTRODUCTION

Girls and young women (hereafter girls) between the ages of 10 and 23 are in a phase of life in which they develop their identities and shape their (future) lives (also known as agency). This implies that girls in this age category are searching for answers to such questions as "who am I?", "what are my talents?", "what do I want out of life" and "what do I find important?" (Bradfort, 2012; Metz, 2013). In this process, girls - more than boys and young men - take into account the rules, social values, norms and customs of her social context (such as family, peers culture, religion, society etc.) (Borovoy & Ghodsee, 2012; Charrad, 2010; Isaacs, 2002; Samman & Santos, 2009; Tang & Anderson, 1999). Most girls manage to find answers to the above questions on their own, in interaction with their social context. However, some girls are subject to one or more forms of vulnerability (e.g. living in a stressful home situation or in poverty or having a cognitive, mental, social or physical disability) which make this process more difficult (Abdallah, 2017). Some of these girls are not able to find answers to the above questions or their social context does not support them or even impedes them in their search. For these girls, there is Girls Work: a method of professional youth work that focuses on supporting the identity development of girls, so that they are better able to shape their own lives (Batsleer, 2013; De Boer & Metz, 2014; Gemmeke et al., 2011; Van der Zande, 1991). Girls Work focuses on girls between the ages of 10 and 23, who live in vulnerable circumstances (Metz, 2017). Much is known about the influence of the social context on the identity development of youth and girls (e.g. Fivush & Buckner, 2000; Ince, Yperen, & Valkestijn, 2013; Matthews & Hubbard, 2008; McGue, Elkins, Walden, & Iacono, 2005). Little is known, however, about whether this influence is the same for girls who participate in Girls Work (i.e. who are living in vulnerable circumstances). Also, youth workers do not know which social contexts influence girls in developing an identity and shaping their lives, and in what way. The present study therefore aims to examine how the identity development of vulnerable girls who participate in Girls Work is influenced by their social context.

A notable characteristic of Girls Work is that it involves an open approach method, which "involves professional interventions with a goal-oriented, process-based, moral and dialogic character" (Donkers, as cited by Metz, 2016, p. 51). The starting point of Youth Work is the world as youths experience it in daily life. For Girls Work, this means that youth workers are there where the girls are literally, i.e. they visit the same locations as the girls, and figuratively, meaning that they work from the perspective and needs of girls. Youth workers offer girls a safe place where they can be themselves and meet

other girls, offer different types of activities, give young people room to learn new things, offer them practical help and provide information and advice (Metz, 2013). Girls Work is seen as a leisure activity for girls (Dunne, Ulicna, Murphy, & Golubeva, 2014; Haidinger, Kasper, Knecht, Kuchler, & Atzmüller, 2016) and is carried out by paid youth workers who have completed formal education (Metz, 2017).

Theoretically, the goal of Girls Work can be described as increasing agency (Boomkens & Metz, 2015). Agency refers to people's capacity to shape their own life, which is affected by intrapersonal, behavioral and environmental factors (Bandura, 2006; Charrad, 2010; Evans, 2017; Hitlin & Elder, 2007; Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2018; Madhok, 2013; Maynard & Stuart, 2018; Meesters, 2018). This suggests that the way people develop their ability to shape their own lives is influenced by their social context. In our previous research on Girls Work, the influence of social context on girls' agency remained underexposed (e.g. Boomkens, Metz, Schalk, & Van Regenmortel, 2019a; Boomkens, Metz, Van Regenmortel, & Schalk, 2019b). However, the existing literature emphasizes the importance of the social context in the development of agency (e.g. Bandura, 2006; Martin & Gillespie, 2010; Maynard & Stuart, 2018; Parsell, Tomaszewski, & Phillips, 2014; Swann & Jetten, 2017). Therefore, it is important to study the influence of different social contexts on agency development in Girls Work.

According to the ecological system theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) people are influenced by different systems within their social context. These systems are the microsystem (family, peers, teachers, partners etc.), the mesosystem (interconnections between the microsystems, such as interactions between parents and teachers), the exosystem (such as school policy and the parents' employers) and the macrosystem (the political, cultural and economic situation in society) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Girls' interactions with the microsystem are shaped through direct personal relationships, while their interactions with the mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem are shaped through indirect influences (e.g. via the media or a change in living conditions as a result of changes in policy). This suggests that people are influenced by different social contexts when developing agency (Bandura, 2006; Frie, 2015; Hutchison, 2005; Martin & Gillespie, 2010; Maynard & Stuart, 2018; Parsell et al., 2014; Swann & Jetten, 2017).

Agency has a moral component, because it appeals to an "ability to 'do the right thing' and to recognize and reflect upon 'wrong' choices'." (Meesters, 2018, p. 76). Girls, more than boys, are concerned about what others expect of them (Duits & De Bruyckere,

2013; Isaacs, 2002), and these expectations can be contradictory (e.g. to both build a career and raise children). However, this does not mean that girls simply obey these expectations of their social context, nor rebel against them; agency is about doing what the girls personally consider to be important. As Bandura (2006) puts it: "...people are contributors to their circumstances, not just products of them" (p. 164). Not only are people influenced by their social contexts, they also need their social contexts, and the cooperation of their social contexts, to bring about change in their lives and in the world (Bradfort, 2012; Callero, 1994; Drydyk, 2013; Frie, 2015; Martin & Gillespie, 2010). Social contexts can offer girls direct support in developing and practicing agency (e.g. emotional or practical support), or indirect support (e.g. by supporting the parents) (Ince et al., 2013). Also, social contexts offer girls a learning environment. By participating in different social contexts, girls gain knowledge and skills that help them make informed choices about their own lives and equip them to take certain actions on their own (Christens, Peterson, & Speer, 2011).

Theoretically, it is clear that the social context has a great influence on girls' agency. However, it is not known how much influence specific social context have on girls, and whether this influence supports or impedes them in the development of agency. Because this information is lacking in Girls Work practice, youth workers cannot fully support girls in developing agency. To provide youth workers with this information, the main question this study aims to answer is: how does the social context of girls in vulnerable circumstances influence their ability to shape their own lives? This information should help youth workers better understand the influence and role of girls' social context and which social context they need to collaborate with.

METHODS

Design

To answer the main question, we used convergent parallel mixed methods, in which we simultaneously collected both quantitative and qualitative data, analyzed them separately, and used the results of both data sets to find out whether they confirmed or rejected each other (Creswell, 2014). According to Creswell, both datasets measure the same thing, but they use a slightly different approach. In our study, both data sets were used to identify social contexts that influence girls' agency. However, the quantitative approach also measured the extent of the influence, while the qualitative approach focused more on whether the girls felt that this influence was supportive or impeding.

The study was conducted in close collaboration with eight Dutch youth work providers for the quantitative approach, and three Dutch youth work providers for the qualitative approach. In addition to granting access to their practice for data collection, the collaboration consisted of participation in a masterclass and girls group to ensure that the research instruments were appropriate to the Girls Work practice (Metz, 2016). The masterclass was attended by a group of 16 youth workers, who were consulted on the development of both research instruments and the development of the protocol for data collection. The girls group consisted of 16 girls participating in Girls Work activities, who were consulted mainly with regard to the development of the quantitative approach, by checking the comprehension of the questions, attractiveness and duration. They also tested the online questionnaire, which led to minor adjustments. The participants of the girls group and the masterclass received goody bags in return for their participation.

Sample and procedure

The data for the quantitative research approach were collected between November 2016 and February 2017. The eight youth work providers who were involved in this study selected 52 Girls Work activities to participate in this study, based on the differentiation of their target group (e.g. girls of different ages, cultural backgrounds, education) and their Girls Work activities (e.g. different types of Girls Work activities, new and older activities). 632 to 676 girls participated in these activities, 435 of whom completed the questionnaire. Of the 435, 39 questionnaires had to be dropped because the participant had forgotten to click 'send' or because of an unstable Wi-Fi connection, as a result of which the software did not yield any answers. Also, three respondents were younger than 10 years and were therefore excluded. This led to the final sample of 393 girls (response rate of approximately 58%).

The data for the qualitative research approach were collected in June 2017. Three of the eight collaborating youth work providers participated in this part of the study (the other five participated in other parts of the study, focusing on themes other than those described in this paper). The six youth workers of these three youth work providers who had participated in the masterclass were asked to select five girls per youth work provider. The selection of the girls in this part of the study might therefore be biased, since not all girls who participated in Girls Work were equally likely to be selected. However, youth workers were instructed to select girls with different ages, cultural backgrounds and duration of participation in Girls Work to make sure that the sample reflected the broad population. One youth work provider failed to select

five girls, because some girls refused to participate for various reasons, e.g. they were too busy studying for their exams or too tired because of pregnancy. This led to a final sample of 14 girls.

In both parts of the study, the youth worker was absent from the room during the data collection in order to reduce response bias. Researchers and trained social work students (20 students for the quantitative approach and 2 for the qualitative approach) collected the data. The students were trained with regard to the attitude to be adopted toward the girls and maintenance of confidentiality. The students had also received instructions about the data collection, the questionnaire and the creative instrument.

Table 1
Overview of the respondents

	Questionnaires		Creative instrument	
	n	%	*n*	%
Age				
10 – 13 years	217	55.2	7	50.0
14 – 17 years	126	32.1	3	21.0
18 – 23 years*	50	12.7	4	28.6
Participating in Girls Work				
Less than 6 months	180	45.8	4	28.6
Between 6 months and 1 year	60	15.3	3	21.4
Between 1 and 3 years	91	23.2	4	28.6
More than 3 years	61	15.5	2	14.3
Total	393	100	14	100

* In the creative instrument one young woman was 26 years old. She was included in the sample because of her experiences in Girls Work.

Table 1 shows that younger girls were overrepresented in the quantitative study, which is – according to the masterclass – typical in the context of youth work in the Netherlands. The mean age of the sample was 13.68 years (*SD* = 3.27). For the qualitative approach, we discussed the selection of the girls with the youth workers of the three youth work providers. As a result, youth workers selected girls from different age groups (10–13; 14–17; 18–23). The mean age of this sample was 15.43 years. In the quantitative sample, girls with a non-Western background (73%) and Islamic girls (61.8%)

were overrepresented (see also Tables 2 and 3). An explanation may lie in Gemmeke et al. (2011), who state that most girls with a non-Western background are not allowed to participate in youth work, and they therefore participate in Girls Work instead. In the qualitative study, we did not ask girls about their background or religion, and as such, we have not made a distinction between the qualitative results of girls from Western and non-Western backgrounds.

Table 2
Influence of different social context on the agency of girls.

	10 – 13 year		14 – 17 year		18 – 23 year		*F*
Micro-context	*n*	*M (SD)*	*n*	*M (SD)*	*n*	*M (SD)*	
Mother[1]	209	4.42 (0.82)	120	4.35 (0.77)	44	3.82 (1.19)	9.09*
Father[1]	187	4.21 (1.00)	104	4.12 (0.92)	32	3.59 (1.27)	5.16*
Sister(s)[1]	133	3.89 (1.16)	81	3.59 (1.19)	34	3.15 (1.23)	5.73*
Brother(s)[1]	135	3.44 (1.32)	82	3.35 (1.28)	35	3.06 (1.28)	1.23_{ns}
Partner	Girls have answered about their future partner				36	3.53 (1.28)	-
Reactions from school[2]	201	3.42 (1.30)	115	3.46 (1.16)	30	3.40 (1.07)	0.05_{ns}
Other relatives	202	3.57 (1.24)	117	3.25 (1.20)	44	2.59 (1.11)	2.53*
Friends	206	3.32 (1.25)	124	3.19 (1.18)	47	3.21 (1.04)	0.48_{ns}
Reactions from work[3]	-	-	3	4.00 (1.00)	10	3.60 (1.65)	0.15_{ns}
Macro-context							
Religion[4]	166	3.94 (1.25)	97	3.81 (1.08)	40	3.80 (1.09)	0.46_{ns}
Islam	136	4.04 (1.20)	72	4.04 (0.88)	35	3.86 (1.12)	
Christian	27	3.56 (1.31)	22	3.14 (1.36)	4	3.25 (0.96)	
Other	3	2.67 (2.08)	3	3.33 (1.53)	1	4.00	
Cultural background	185	3.68 (1.26)	114	3.32 (1.29)	42	3.38 (1.29)	3.08**
Dutch society	196	3.33 (1.27)	118	3.20 (1.21)	47	3.47 (1.28)	0.86_{ns}
Social Media	188	3.04 (1.46)	121	3.07 (1.26)	45	2.64 (1.32)	1.72_{ns}
Neighbors	194	2.46 (1.25)	119	2.16 (1.16)	43	1.95 (1.23)	4.18**

Note. * = Significant at < .010; ** = Significant at < .050; $_{ns}$ = Not Significant; [1] = Only girls who stated in a previous question that they have this family member; [2]= Only girls who indicate that they 'mainly go to school during the day'; [3]= Only girls who indicate that they 'mainly work during the day'; [4] = Only girls who indicate to have a religion.

Table 3
Difference in macro-contexts between Girls with a Western and non-Western background

Macro-context	Girls with a Western-background		Girls with a non-Western background		*F*
	n	*M (SD)*	*n*	*M (SD)*	
Religion	39	3.44 (1.37)	263	3.94 (1.13)	6.43, $p = .012$
Cultural background	76	2.76 (1.33)	264	3.75 (1.17)	39.73, $p = .000$
Dutch Society	90	2.98 (1.25)	270	3.42 (1.19)	9.18, $p = .003$

Measures

For the quantitative part of this study we used a questionnaire of our own design in which we included 17 items about the extent to which girls take into account the opinion or expectations of several social contexts when developing agency. The social contexts we included are the personal relationships within the microsystem (e.g. father, mother, friends) and indirect influences of the macrosystem (e.g. religion, culture). These social contexts were included because theory suggests that these social contexts may have a strong influence on people in general (e.g. Bradfort, 2012; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These social contexts were then presented to the masterclass and the girls group to make sure all the social contexts were included. Girls were asked to indicate how much each social context influenced their agency. Items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “Very little (not)” to 5 “Very much” (see Appendix D). Girls could also select the option “does not apply”; these answers were treated as missing. The quantitative data produced data on which social contexts influence girls’ agency, and to what degree.

For the qualitative part of this study we used a creative research instrument of our own design to examine whether the influence of the social contexts was supportive or impeded girls. We choose not to operationalize what we considered supporting or impeding influences, because we wanted to see how the girls themselves defined specific influences. We chose to use a creative research instrument instead of indepth interviews in order to help the girls think carefully about their own experiences with different social contexts (Gold, Wigram, & Elefant, 2006) and to help them express themselves (Bartelink, Boendermaker, & Vliet, 2013). The use of the creative research instrument helped girls visualize their social contexts and reflect on the influence of these social contexts.

The instrument comprised four steps. First, the girls wrote down or drew their dreams about what they wanted to achieve in life. In this way, we understood more about how the girls would like to shape their lives. Next, the girls used stickers to indicate which social contexts supported or impeded these dreams. The girls could also choose stickers on which certain social contexts had been pre-written. These stickers were then stuck on wooden cubes (impeding social contexts) or on ping-pong balls (supporting social contexts). During this process, the researcher or student asked the girls to explain why they found a social context to be supportive or impeding. The third step was to indicate which social contexts were the most supportive or impeding. To this end, girls placed a star-shaped sticker on the wooden cube or ping-pong ball which corresponded to the social context in question. Finally, in step 4, a researcher or student worked together with each of the girls to build a wall of the wooden blocks in front of their written or drawn dream for the future, symbolizing how these social contexts obstructed the dream. The girls then used the ping-pong balls to try to topple the wall, bringing the dreams back into view. This last step was intended to end every 'interview' in a positive way. Next, a photograph was taken of the girls' work and all the 'interviews' were transcribed.

Analysis

The analyses of the quantitative data were carried out using SPSS PASW Statistics 18. An analysis of variances (ANOVA) with age groups as independent variables and the degree of influence exerted by specific social contexts as dependent variables were conducted to test for group differences. For the analyses of qualitative data, we used thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) to define and analyze themes in the data. The thematic analysis comprised five phases: 1) closely reading the transcriptions; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for overarching themes; 4) reconsidering the themes; and 5) confirming and naming the themes. The analysis was carried out using MaxQDA 18, a program for qualitative data analysis.

Ethical considerations

Data collection (and analysis) was carried out in accordance with the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice (published by VSNU, 2014). Approval for this study was arranged with the managers of the three participating youth work providers. Youth workers selected girls for participation in this study. They informed the girls (and their parents if the girls were younger than 16 years) by letter, which was provided by the researchers. In some cases, the youth worker did not inform the parents (e.g. when the

parents did not know that their daughter was participating in Girls Work). Appointments for the qualitative data collection were scheduled only after each girl had informed her youth worker that she wanted to participate. Girls (or parents) who did not wish to participate in the quantitative data collection were free to indicate their decision not to participate as late as the day of the data collection itself, or simply failed to appear. The anonymity of all the girls, the Girls Work activities they attended and the youth worker was ensured. In the transcripts of the interviews, all names were deleted. The students who helped with the data collection were required to sign a confidentiality form before they were allowed to begin the data collection.

RESULTS

The results of both the quantitative and qualitative approach showed that the girls took their social contexts into account while developing agency (see Table 2). Within the quantitative approach, girls indicated that different social contexts within the macrosystem had a high influence on how they acquired agency (see also Table 2). Three social contexts within the macrosystem (religion, cultural background and Dutch society) even had a bigger influence on girls than some of their social contexts within the microsystem. For example, religion had a strong influence on girls' agency, and this influence was even stronger than the influence of their siblings and friends, and for the girls above 18 years it was also stronger than their fathers' influence. Similarly, the norms and values of girls' cultural backgrounds had more influence on their agency than friends or brothers. In the Netherlands, religion is becoming less important for youth, but it is more important for people with non-Western backgrounds (Schmeets, 2018). Therefore, we expected religion to be more important for girls with a non-Western background (one or two parents born outside a Western country) than for girls with a Western background. We also investigated this difference in relation to other social contexts (see Table 3).

Looking at the social contexts within the microsystem, the influence on girls' agency takes a different form in the three age categories. Not surprisingly, girls in the age bracket of 10–13 years were more affected by parental influence and the support they received from school (teachers and classmates). Despite the diminishing influence of parents in the age bracket of 14–17 years, parents were still the most important social context for girls of this age. The influence of nearly all social contexts shrank slightly during this age. For girls between 18 and 23 years, their own desires were more important than the influence of any specific social context; accordingly, they strove to

maintain contact only with those social contexts that supported their dreams. In the qualitative part of the study, we asked girls which social contexts influenced them and how. The thematic analysis elicited different themes based on which this influence could be understood, but because the influence depends on the social contexts, we chose to describe the influences for each social context within the microsystem individually (the girls did not indicate how the social context of the macrosystem influenced them). The themes were based on quotes from the participants. Below, we describe the influences of different social contexts for each age group. We start each paragraph with results from the quantitative part of this study, to provide an overview of the influence of each social context. Then, based on the qualitative approach, we describe whether this influence supported or impeded girls' agency and illustrate this influence using information from the qualitative approach.

Parents should always support their daughters

The results suggest that parents have a lot of influence on girls' agency (both in the quantitative and qualitative data). Parents had a significantly higher influence on girls with a non-Western background than on girls with a Western background (see Table 3). Based on the quantitative data, we see that the influence of parents decreased significantly as the girls' age increased (see Table 2). However, parents remained one of the most influential social contexts for the girls (especially mothers had a lot of influence). We asked the girls in the qualitative study whether they felt that this influence was supportive or impeding. All girls between 10 and 13 years stated that their parents were supportive for them, because they were always there for them, helped them with their homework, or had similar dreams for the future as the girls. For girls between 14 and 17 years old, the parental influence could be both supportive and obstructive. For example, one girl said that her parents were generally supportive, but that her father hindered certain dreams because he was afraid that she would give up certain values from her religion (Islam) and culture (Morocco). Another girl indicated that she was hindered by her mother, because she was still underage and therefore her mother "has power over her." Her mother was also hindering her because of their problematic relationship: "... She knew her ex was sexually assaulting me, and she let that happen... Yes she just makes me weak, she just calls me whore." (14 years). This girl receives no support from her father, who lives outside the Netherlands and is regularly in prison.

For girls older than 18 years, the influence of mothers remained the most important, while the father's influence diminished almost to the same level as partners and work.

Also in the qualitative study, three of the four girls even did not have any contact with their fathers (it remained unclear why they did not have contact with their fathers). The influence of the parents on girls in this age group could be both supportive and obstructive. One girl said that she and her mother had different personalities and different views on life, so her mother could be obstructive, but since she was pregnant, her mother gave her practical support (e.g. purchasing items required for the baby). One girl had contact with both her mother and father, who were both supportive. Her biggest dream was to get married, and she found her parents' opinion very important in this matter. She even said that she wanted her parents to choose a husband for her: "They will take care of it [getting married]... but I have full confidence in that. I'm not someone who talks to boys." (23 years).

I can talk to my sister about anything

The results of both the quantitative and qualitative study suggested that siblings were important to all the girls. The influence of sisters reduced significantly as girls increased in age, while the influence of brothers remained approximately the same (see Table 2). However, sisters influenced girls more than brothers. For girls with a non-Western background, the influence of their siblings was significantly higher than for girls with a Western background (See Table 3). In the qualitative study, girls stated that the influence of their sisters was supportive because they could talk to them about anything, because they served as a role model, or simply because they could have fun together. However, the girls felt that the influence of their siblings could sometimes be impeding. A 23-year-old woman said that her brother hindered her in only one specific dream, namely to start her own family: "Yes, but he does not want it [for her to get married]. He is so jealous that he bought me an engagement ring and I had to wear it when I went to weddings. And they [other people] thought we were a couple every time we went to weddings." For two girls, sisters were a hindrance because they had different personalities than the girls in question. Despite that, their sister remained very important to them: "We can talk about anything, except personal things." (23 years).

Not close with relatives, unless they possess certain experience or knowledge

The broader family was especially influential for girls between the ages of 10–13 years. Relatives influenced girls more than brothers, school or friends at this age (see Table 2). As girls increased in age, the influence of their relatives reduced significantly, and even became the least influential social context within the microsystem for girls above 18 years (see Table 2). This trend was also visible in the qualitative study, in

which girls above 18 stated that they were not close to relatives, or that relatives lived too far away. Girls in all age groups indicated that if relatives were supportive, it was because of their knowledge and experience based on their professions (e.g. a cousin who is a professional singer, an aunt who is a dance teacher, an uncle who is an Imam): "My parents and my uncle are the most important to me because he [uncle] also knows a lot about our religion and he knows so many people." (23 year). There was no significant difference in the level of influence between girls from non-Western and Western backgrounds.

Peers are more important than friends

Girls are influenced by different kinds of peers, such as friends. Both data sets suggest that the influence of friends is "average", in fact, friends had less influence on girls than any other social context within the microsystem (see Table 2). The influence of friends remained almost the same for girls in all age groups. The qualitative data gives an explanation for this average influence. The girls called friends obstructive (especially between 14 and 17 years), because they felt that their friends were bad influences, and because of bad experiences in the past. For example, one girl became a victim of sexting because of her 'best friend': "A boy coerced me into taking a [naked] picture and I did it. But you could not even see it clearly, it was really dark and she [her best friend] wanted to see that picture and I trusted her completely (...). I sent that photo to her and when I went to Suriname she sent it to others." (14 years). Friends who were supportive supported girls verbally, especially by giving compliments or encouragement. Friends of girls above 18 years, also gave practical support (e.g. taking them to appointments). Table 3 shows that friends had significantly more influence on girls with a Western background. One of the girls in the qualitative study stated that she had friends with whom she could "hang out", but that these friends' behavior did not fit with her personal values and they therefore had no influence on her agency.

Other peers who influenced the girls' agency were classmates. It is striking that girls of all age groups indicated that their classmates influenced them more than their friends did (see Table 2). According to one 10-year-old girl, this was because she spent a lot of time with classmates (during school hours). Classmates influenced the girls between 10 and 17 years in both positive and negative ways, although the girls could list more obstructive classmates than supportive classmates. Classmates were supportive when they were protective and made sure the girls were all right (e.g. when a girl had had an accident). They were obstructive when they spread gossip about girls or they did not

accept girls as they were. For example, one 10-year-old girl said that her peers thought her intention for the future (she wanted to wear a headscarf in the future) was strange, that she was "too dumb to be a doctor", and that they laughed at her: "For example, a while ago I was reading a part of the Quran because I was scared. And I think she [a girls from her street] also reads bits of the Bible. And then I read it aloud, quite loudly, and then she started laughing at me.... Then I had the feeling whether this was racism or something." (10 years). The four girls above 18 years who participated in the qualitative part did not mention classmates, because they were not in any kind of school.

He was my best friend, now he is my boyfriend

As girls get older, they encounter a new social context in the microsystem: the romantic partner. Both the quantitative and qualitative data suggest that this new social context immediately has a strong influence on girls. For girls above 18 years, their partner became more important than many other social contexts within the microsystem, except for their parents (see Table 2). No quantitative data is available regarding the girls below 18 years, since most of the girls' answers were about the partner they expected to have in the future, and their answers were therefore not representative. Four girls in the qualitative study currently had a partner and thought of him as more or less supportive. Two girls in 14–17 age group who had a boyfriend said that he was very important to them. These girls both had a difficult home situation and they both experienced support from their boyfriends in this regard: "Last week I had a very bad fight with my grandmother.... I actually wanted to run away from home ... He [her boyfriend] put me in front of the door and he only left after I went inside." (14 years). Two girls in the 18+ age group indicated that they could talk with their partners about their lives and future, but that they could not have deep conversations with them (because of the residential distance or because their partner made them question their goals). A 23-year-old woman decided to end the relationship because her partner did not want to have the baby she was expecting, while she wanted to keep the baby. She said that a partner should truly make her happy, and she would not settle down with anyone who did not.

I hope they can help me

Girls' agency is also influenced by people from institutions. Different people influence girls, depending on their age. In the quantitative study, we did not ask girls specifically about these social contexts, and therefore we could not compare the level of influence with other social contexts. In the qualitative study we used open questions, and the girls

therefore named all social contexts they could think of. The results suggest that adults at school encouraged girls between 10 and 13 years, but this was mainly with regard to their future dreams regarding school or career: "It depends on what, for example my dream about school, someone from school could help me. But dreams about other things, others help me." (13 years). They helped girls by searching for information about future goals, telling girls which steps to take to achieve their future goal, putting girls into contact with important people, or letting girls know they believe in them.

Girls between 14 and 17 years old showed a different attitude to adults at school. They indicated that they did not trust anyone from school: "I trusted her [confidential advisor from school] before. I told her everything that was on my mind. And she said that she would keep everything secret and that it would stay between us... And then she told my grandmother about it, behind my back, which gave me more problems than I already had" (14 years). The same applies with regard to youth care professionals (other than youth workers). The girls found it hard to trust them due to bad experiences in the past. The girls in this age group all experienced the youth workers as supportive because they made the girls feel like they were there for them: "(...) and just showed me that someone is there for me and wants to listen to me. Without always being told that I am doing it wrong." (14 years). All girls above 18 years felt that their youth worker was supportive, which take shape in different forms. First, they had in-depth conversations with their youth worker and they could talk with them about specific topics. They preferred to share such matters with their youth worker than with someone else. Second, their youth worker helped them think about how they could achieve their dreams: "They can always point out the right path." (26 years). Third, youth workers helped girls to actually try to achieve something: "...hopefully she can lead me there." (23 years). Furthermore, when girls reach the age of 18, they are introduced to institutions mainly meant for adults, like the Public Health Service (Dutch: GGD) and debt counselors. Youth workers support girls by talking with the girls or by giving them practical support. A new social context also appeared in this age group: people from work (e.g. colleagues, employer). This social context immediately became very influential, having a stronger influence than most other social contexts within the microsystem (see Table 2). Because the girls in the qualitative study were currently unemployed, we could not identify this social context as either supportive or obstructive.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this study we examined which social contexts influence girls in vulnerable circumstances in developing agency, and whether this influence is supporting or impeding. The results detailed above highlight which social contexts influence girls' agency in each age group. In general, girls between 10 and 13 years were more bound to parental influence (which they found supportive) and the support they received at school (teachers and classmates). The influence of nearly all social contexts within the microsystem shrank slightly for girls aged 14–17. Parents were still the most important social context for girls of this age, although their influence was both supportive and obstructive. The influence of social contexts further decreased for girls aged 18–23. Girls in this age group knew better what they wanted and ought to stay in contact only with those social contexts that supported their dreams.

To examine more closely which social contexts influenced girls and how, we differentiated between social contexts within the microsystem and macrosystem. Three social contexts within the macrosystem, namely religion, cultural background and Dutch society, had a strong influence on girls' agency in all age-groups. As the girls' age increased, the influence of social contexts in the microsystem decreased more than the influence of the social contexts in the macrosystem. As a consequence, the influence of some social contexts in the macrosystem became higher than many social contexts in the microsystem. Especially religion had a lot of influence on all the girls who described themselves as religious. However, girls with a non-Western background were significantly more influenced by social contexts within the macrosystem (religion, culture, Dutch society) than girls with a Western background. This suggests that especially the girls with non-Western backgrounds who participate in Girls Work found it important to fulfill the (sometimes contradictory) expectations of different social contexts within the macrosystem. These results were in line with previous research on youths (Leeman & Saharso, 2013). According to Duits and De Bruyckere (2013), girls – more than boys – are concerned with identifying appropriate behavior and what is considered to be 'normal.' What is 'normal' depends on the rules, norms and values of different social contexts. This could explain why the girls felt that some of the social contexts within the macrosystem had a strong influence on their agency. Because these girls live in two cultures, they need to actively relate to both cultures.

Interestingly, girls only identified social contexts within the macrosystem when specifically asked to do so, suggesting that the girls were not directly aware of the

influence of these social contexts. Accordingly, the girls in the qualitative study did not indicate how these social contexts influenced their agency. Girls were more aware of how social contexts within the microsystem influenced them. Most social contexts became less important as the girls' age increased, while new social contexts (such as romantic partners or work) could instantly have a strong influence on their agency. Social contexts within the microsystem supported girls by giving them the opportunity to talk about their futures, and they received emotional and practical support in developing agency. Girls found it impeding when a social context made fun of them or attempts to hinder them in how they wished to shape their lives.

Within the microsystem, social contexts such as family and peers influenced the girls most in developing agency. Whether this was supportive or obstructive depended on past experiences with this social context. It is known that as young people grow older, they develop a greater need for autonomy and independence, as a result of which they become more detached from their parents (Denham, Wyatt, Bassett, Echeverria, & Knox, 2009; McGue et al., 2005). However, mothers remain a great support for girls (Updegraff, McHale, Crouter, & Kupanoff, 2001). With the present study, we can confirm the strength of the influence that mothers have on girls living in vulnerable circumstances.

Also, friendships are known to be important for young girls, because they allow them to practice relationships and discover appropriate behavior (Duits & De Bruyckere, 2013; Ince et al., 2013; Meeus & Dekovic, 1995; Nijhof & Engels, 2015). It is therefore a striking finding of this study that friends appeared to have the least influence on the girls. One explanation could be that the girls had bad experiences with (alleged) friends. Meesters (2018) confirms this finding in her research among youths who participate in youth work. According to her, most youths violate their mutual trust with some regularity. The girls who participated in this study also indicated that their "former friends" had violated their trust before, which was the reason they were no longer friends. It is also striking that after the age of 18, the influence of friends decreased even further. According to Duits and De Bruyckere (2013), it is normal for girls' friendships to become less intensive after they graduate from secondary school. The 'best friend' is then replaced by groups of friends or by an intimate relationship (boyfriend). Within this study, we also saw that romantic partners had a strong influence on girls above 18 years of age, and the qualitative approach revealed that girls who had a partner tended to have no or fewer supportive friends.

The masterclass revealed that most girls stop with youth work as soon as they start with secondary school. Therefore, most girls up to 14 years who are still participating in Girls Work are in greater need of support. If we look at the results of this study, we found that youth workers were especially important for girls up to 14 years old who do not have (many) supportive adults in their lives or have multiple problems (in their home situation, racism etc.). These girls also received support from institutional services. For girls between 14 and 17 years, such institutional services were obstructive because – just like former friends – they had had bad experiences with them and no longer trusted them. The only institutional service they did trust was their youth worker. For girls above 18 years, the institutional services helped them with specific issues (such as financial issues), while the youth worker supported them in different aspects in their lives.

Limitations

Although the findings show which social contexts influence girls in developing agency and how, our study has some limitations. It could be that younger girls had not yet started developing agency, since people usually begin to think about their future around the age of 12. This was also seen in young girls in our sample who did not fully know how they would like to shape their lives as adults. However, these girls did know how they would like to shape their lives within the next year or so, and therefore they provided us with useful information about the influence of their social contexts.

The interviews with the younger girls (10 and 11 years old) were shorter than the interviews with other girls. This was because of their shorter attention span, their occasionally shorter answers, and because we did not always manage to ask more in-depth questions. However, the use of the creative instrument provided a suitable means of obtaining the required answers.

The results help us understand how the girls who participate in Girls Work think about the influence of different social contexts on their agency. The results are only valid for Girls Work in the Netherlands and cannot be generalized to all girls in vulnerable circumstances and in other countries. It would therefore be interesting to replicate this study with girls in other social contexts (not only girls who participate in Girls Work).

Implications for practice

The research confirms that the agency of girls who participate in Girls Work in the Netherlands is influenced by their social contexts. It is therefore important for

youth workers to identify the supporting and impeding social contexts of girls. The results show that friends did not have a high influence on these girls, because of bad experiences with friends in the past. Since the existing literature states that friends are very important for girls, youth workers should focus more on bringing girls into contact with other girls (or boys for that matter) and invest in supporting girls in establishing and maintaining friendships. A social context which has a high influence on all girls (whether impeding or supporting) is the mother. Therefore, youth workers should focus on the relationship between girls and their mothers. For example, youth workers could talk more with the girls about their relationship with their mothers, or invite mothers to certain activities. The results indicate that some of the social contexts had a stronger influence on girls with a non-Western background (such as religion, culture, Dutch society, parents and siblings). Therefore, youth workers should seek to find out how a girl relates to these social contexts, and be aware of the role of these social contexts and the (sometimes contradictory) expectations they have of girls. Also, it is important for youth workers to talk about these differences with girls with from both Western and non-Western backgrounds.

The influence of the social contexts changes over time, which requires youth workers to be aware of the changes in the role of each specific social context. Youth workers should identify which social environments are supportive and obstructive for a girl, and seek to establish some form of contact or collaboration with these social contexts. Since trust seems to be very important for these girls, youth workers should consult girls individually before trying to contact or collaborate with specific social contexts, in order to avoid any sense of betrayal or of going behind a girls' back.

Appendix D

Influence of social contexts on girls' agency (original in Dutch).

We have developed this scale to measure the influence of the social contexts on agency of girls between the age of 10 and 23, who participate in professional girls work in the Netherlands.

	Nothing / very little	Little	Not much / not a little	Much	Very much	Does not apply
How much do you take into account the opinions of the following social contexts when you think about your own (future) lives:						
My father						
My mother						
My brother(s)						
My sister(s)						
Other relatives						
My partner (boyfriend)						
My friends						
Neighbors						
How much do you take into account the following social contexts when you think about your own (future) lives:						
Reactions from school						
Reactions from work						
If it is in line with my religion						
If it is in line with my own culture (e.g. Suriname, Moroccan etc.)						
If it is in line within the norms and values of the Dutch society						
Reactions on Social Media						

6

Chapter **7**

General Discussion

BACKGROUND

Since the turn of the millennium, policy on professional youth work has shifted towards more evidence-based youth work (Dunne, Ulicna, Murphy, & Golubeva, 2014). Since Girls Work is a method of professional youth work, the call for evidence-based approaches also applies to Girls Work. Currently, a research-based substantiation of the Girls Work method is lacking, which means that youth workers are unable to demonstrate their results or to explain the importance of using gender-specific approaches (Metz, 2016). This results in three problems. First, the funding of professional youth work is nowadays linked more to the measurable outcomes (Dunne et al., 2014). Since such results cannot be provided for Girls Work, some funders (mainly municipalities) have threatened to cut back on Girls Work or even to stop funding Girls Work altogether (Boomkens, Rauwerdink-Nijland, Van der Grient, Van Trijp, & Metz, 2018). Second, the importance of Girls Work is not acknowledged by managers, other youth workers and other social work professionals, causing difficulties in the collaboration with other professionals or with maintaining Girls Work within the own organization (Metz, 2016). Third, each youth worker has to find out for themselves how to act with the target group.

Therefore, the aim of the current thesis is *to substantiate the Girls Work method*. By substantiating the Girls Work method, youth workers hope to strengthen the quality and professionalization of Girls Work (Metz, 2016). In a previous study, the aim of Girls Work was described as follows: to support girls between 10-23 years old with their identity development, so girls are able to shape their own lives (De Boer & Metz, 2012, 2014). In the current thesis this aim is central to how we substantiate the Girls Work method.

This substantiation of the Girls Work method was examined in three ways. First, we reviewed theoretical concepts which could be used to *understand the underlying mechanism* of how the Girls Work method works (Chapter 2). A theoretical substantiation of a method could specify the aim, increase the acknowledgement of the method, provide youth workers guidance in how to act, and connect policy with practice (Dunne et al., 2014; Van Yperen, Veerman, & Bijl, 2017).

Second, we conducted a quantitative study in which girls who participate in Girls Work filled out an online questionnaire (n = 393). With this study we wanted to *empirically substantiate the Girls Work method*. Our first aim of this quantitative study was to examine to what extent the Girls Work method achieves the intended results. Therefore, in Chapter 3 we explored whether participation in Girls Work helps girls to shape their

own lives. The second aim of this quantitative study (Chapter 4) was to examine how girls who participate in Girls Work experience the actions of the youth workers (which were described as the methodic principles). Also we wanted to examine whether girls with different characteristic and girls who participate in different Girls Work approaches experienced methodic principles differently. In Chapter 5 we used data from this study to explore whether and how these methodic principles contribute to both the process and the aim of Girls Work.

Third, we conducted a mixed-methods study in which girls were asked which and how their social contexts influence them in shaping their own lives (Chapter 6). Although it is known that the social context influences girls in how they shape their lives (Isaacs, 2002), it is currently unknown how they influence the girls who participate in Girls Work (which are living in vulnerable circumstances). With this knowledge, youth workers can collaborate more with the social context of girls.

MAIN FINDINGS

Chapter 2 provides a theoretical substantiation of the Girls Work method. Research on Social Work shows different theoretical concepts that could be used to substantiate the aim of Girls Work. However, we used the theoretical concepts of *agency* and *empowerment* for the theoretical substantiation of the Girls Work method, because these concepts focus more on the positive development of people, are more strengths-based, and they focus more on individuals within their social context than other commonly used theories (Boomkens & Metz, 2015). This fits the Girls Work practice since its focus on positive development fits with the general development-oriented approach of professional youth work, where the target group is seen as girls with potential instead of 'problems'. Also, the strength-based approach resonates with Girls Work given its focus on strengthening girls' "individual strength" (see also Chapter 3). Finally, the social context of girls plays an important role in how girls (are able to) shape their own lives (Borovoy & Ghodsee, 2012; Charrad, 2010; Samman & Santos, 2009; Tang & Anderson, 1999) and therefore, it is important to consider the social context.

In the literature we found that there are multiple operationalizations of both agency and empowerment, and therefore also of how they relate to each other. Therefore, a clear definition or operationalization of both concepts is important. In our study we used the definitions of Bandura (2001) to operationalize agency and Rappaport (1987) and Zimmerman (1995) to operationalize empowerment. We found that when using

these definitions, empowerment can be seen as the process that precedes agency. According to Bandura, agency is people's ability to shape their own lives, in relation to their own values and in alignment with their own social context. This focus on the ability to shape one's own life – in relation to the social context of girls - is also a central element in the aim of the Girls Work method. Therefore, we use the concept of agency to further understand the aim of Girls Work. Since agency consists of multiple properties (Bandura, 2006), we argue that the aim of Girls Work also covers multiple properties. These properties are: to set intentions for future (intentionality), to set realistic goals and anticipate likely outcomes (forethought), to act upon these intentions (self-reactiveness), and to reflect upon their thoughts and actions (self-reflection). We argue that the theory of agency offers youth workers who work in Girls Work a theoretical framework to focus more specifically on supporting girls to shape their own lives. Theory suggests that in order to support people in shaping their lives, they should focus on all four properties of agency (Bandura, 2006). Therefore, youth workers should also focus on supporting girls with these properties within Girls Work.

Furthermore, for the theoretical understanding of how the Girls Work method works, we argue that empowerment should be used when supporting girls in the development of agency. Empowerment is a multi-level concept (Rappaport, 1987), but in our study we only use psychological empowerment, which focuses on the individual but does not overlook other contexts (Zimmerman, 1995). Youth workers focus primarily on the girls themselves, and they cooperate with other contexts when needed. When working with the girls, the youth workers take account of (the values, influences etc. of) the girls' contexts. Therefore, our study focuses on psychological empowerment, which is seen to consist of three components: (1) interactional component, (2) intrapersonal component and (3) behavioral component (Zimmerman, 1995). When applying this to the Girls Work practice, it suggest that youth workers should (1) focus on the individual girl (to make her believe in her own ability to influence her life and to motivate her), (2) help girls to understand their context (to give girls an understanding of their social and material resources) and (3) support girls in their participation in different social contexts (to influence that social context, to learn new skills, to increase their social network and to strengthen their sense of personal control). According to the youth workers with whom we discussed the results, empowerment is given a specific role within Girls Work (Boomkens & Metz, 2015). Here, the workers focus more on specific elements of empowerment than in mixed youth work. For example, they concentrate on the girls' self-efficacy and on raising their awareness of their own skills. Youth workers explained

that some girls who attend Girls Work are more insecure about themselves and do not always believe they have the power to change something in their lives. Therefore, we argue that empowerment also has a gender-specific interpretation.

The next step was to empirically substantiate the Girls Work method, in which we first operationalized these theoretical concepts. In Chapter 3, we first examined whether participation in Girls Work contributes to how girls shape their own lives (agency). Data were collected from 393 girls who participate in 52 different Girls Work activities through 8 youth work providers in the Netherlands. Based on the operationalization of Bandura's (2006) agency, we developed a questionnaire to measure agency ($\alpha = .83$). First, we found that the age of girls significantly influences girls' agency. According to Van Beemen (2006) people start to think about what they want in their lives around the age of 12 years. Therefore, all the analyses described below are controlled for age. Second, we found that participation in Girls Work significantly contributes to only one of the properties of agency: intentionality. This suggests that Girls Work is mainly effective in supporting girls to think about what they want for themselves or to change something in their lives. Since agency is about intentionally doing something, setting an intention is a prerequisite to action (Chirkov, 2011, Evans, 2007; Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2018; Madhok, 2013; Maynard & Stuart, 2018; Meesters, 2018; Parsell, Tomaszewski, & Phillips, 2014; Parsell, Eggings, & Marston, 2017; Paternoster & Pogarsky, 2009; Samman & Santos, 2009; Smith et al., 2000). We did not find a significant relationship between participation in Girls Work and the other three properties of agency.

To substantiate a method, it is also important to focus on the methodical actions of the professionals (Foolen, Van der Steege, & De Lange, 2011). As mentioned in the introduction, the methodical actions of youth workers within Girls Work were described in a previous study as *methodic principles* (De Boer & Metz, 2014), which are the principles that guide youth workers in their methodical actions in contact with the target group (Metz & Sonneveld, 2012). Characteristic for the methodic principles is that they should be used in Girls Work irrespective of the girls' ages, their cultural backgrounds, how long they have participated in Girls Work and the approach they receive (Metz & Sonneveld, 2012). In previous research, nine methodic principles were identified which are specific for Girls Work (De Boer & Metz, 2012, 2014). These are: safety, meaningful relationship, acquaintance, take into account the needs of girls, positive motivation, boundaries, expanding lifeworld, talk and use of social context.

Since the methodic principles should be reflected in the actual contact with girls (Metz & Sonneveld, 2012), we explored in Chapter 4 whether girls who participate in Girls Work recognize the methodic principles of their youth workers. In our study, we had to exclude the methodic principle 'use of social context' due to incorrect measurement (therefore, we asked girls about their social context in Chapter 6). All of the other methodic principles were recognized by the girls, which confirms the use of these methodic principles for the Girls Work method. We did find some differences in the extent to which girls recognize the methodic principles. Girls above 18 years recognized two methodic principles more than other girls: safety and boundaries. Results show that older girls feel safer in Girls Work than younger girls. The findings do not suggest that youth workers have more attention for feelings of safety with older girls, however. It could be that older girls are more conscious of feelings of safety and therefore recognize this methodic principle more than younger girls. For the methodic principle of boundaries, the results show that older girls - because they participate in Girls Work - know better what their own boundaries are, how to indicate their boundaries to others and are better aware of accepted behavior. It could be that youth worker have more attention for this, because girls above 18 years who participate in Girls Work have more problems with indicating their boundaries. Furthermore, the girls' cultural background, how long they have participated in Girls Work and the Girls Work approach did not influence the recognition of the methodic principles. We therefore argue that these methodic principles are valid for the different girls who participate in different Girls Work approaches.

The next step was to examine the relation between the concepts of agency, empowerment and the methodic principles. In Chapter 5, we found that the methodic principles are a predictor of empowerment, and that empowerment is a predictor of agency. This suggests that empowerment can be seen as the process through which youth workers support girls in how they shape their lives (agency) with their actions (expressed in the methodic principles). This only applied when all three components (intrapersonal, interactional and behavioral component) of empowerment were included, suggesting that when focusing on empowerment, youth workers should always focus on all three components of empowerment. This is in line with earlier studies on measuring empowerment, which argue that empowerment should always be measured using all three components (Eisman et al., 2016; Rodriguez, Menezes, & Ferreira, 2017; Steenssens, Van Regenmortel, & Schalk, 2017; Zimmerman, 1995). We also found that the methodic principles also directly predict agency and therefore we

argue that the methodic principles contribute to both the process and the aim of the Girls Work method.

Furthermore, we examined whether the methodic principles influence a specific property of agency more than others. This, because agency consists of four properties (intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflection; Bandura, 2006). We found that two of the properties (forethought and self-reflection) are influenced both directly and indirectly (mediated through empowerment) by the methodic principles. The other two properties (intentionality and self-reactiveness) are only indirectly influenced by the methodic principles, through empowerment. Differences in these findings could be explained by the characteristics of these properties. Since the properties of intentionality and self-reactiveness focus on actually aiming for and doing what girls want in their lives, we argue that these properties may therefore require more empowerment of the girls.

Last, we wanted to examine whether specific methodic principles have a different influence on the development of agency. Eight of the nine methodic principles that were measured in this thesis influence both the process (empowerment) and the aim of Girls Work (agency). This suggests that youth workers should use all of the methodic principles, because with this, they contribute to the aim of Girls Work. However, we also found that the methodic principles influence the aim of Girls Work in two ways. First, some methodic principles influence agency both directly and indirectly through empowerment. These methodic principles are: safety, meaningful relationship, take into account the needs of girls and boundaries. Second, some methodic principles only indirectly influence girls' agency through empowerment. These methodic principles are acquaintance, positive motivation, expanding lifeworld and talk. This suggests that all of the methodic principles contribute to the aim through the process of empowerment, but that some of them also influence the aim directly. In Chapter 2, we argued that empowerment is the process of developing agency. With the findings from Chapter 5 we confirmed the role of empowerment in the substantiation of the Girls Work method.

The use of social context as a methodic principle was not measured correctly in our study. However, both the theoretical concepts of agency and empowerment emphasize the importance of the social context in how people shape their lives (e.g. Isaacs, 2002). Therefore, in Chapter 6 we decided to focus on the influence of the social context in how girls can shape their lives. In this study, we focused on two systems within

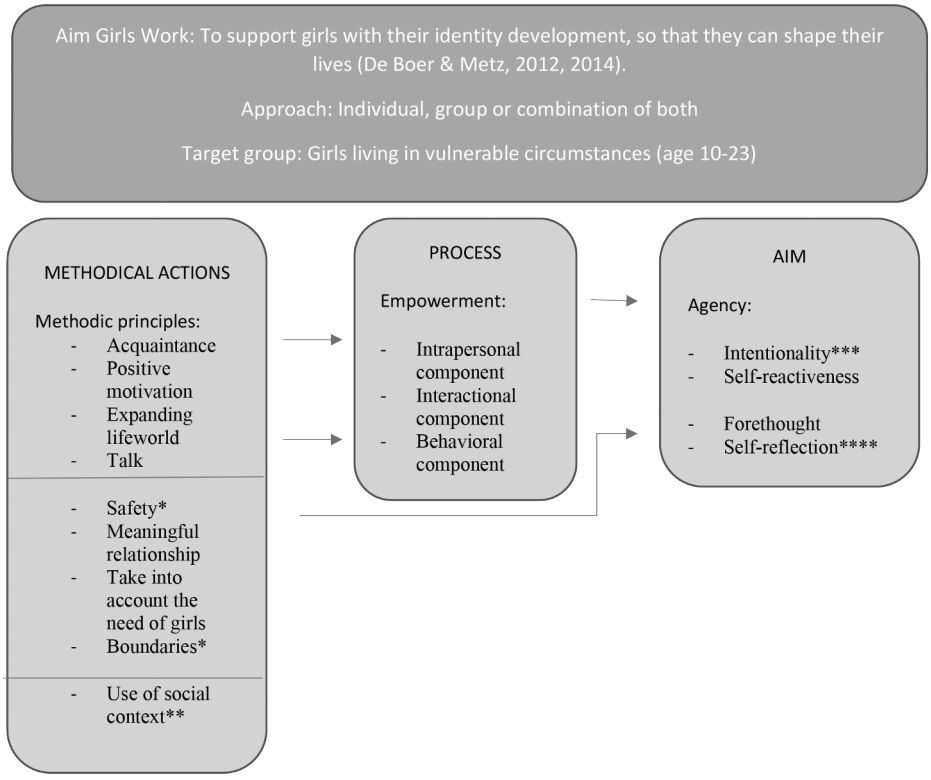
the social context: the microsystem (family, peers, teachers, partners etc.), and the macrosystem (the political, cultural and economic situation in society) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to the literature, girls in general take the expectations, rules, social values, norms and customs of these social contexts more into account than boys (Borovoy & Ghodsee, 2012; Charrad, 2010; Isaacs, 2002; Samman & Santos, 2009; Tang & Anderson, 1999). It was unknown whether and how this also applies to girls growing up in vulnerable circumstances (who participate in Girls Work). However, Isaacs (2002) mentions that the values, expectations, social rules etc. from different social contexts are sometimes contradictory, especially among girls with a low education level or a migration background (Isaacs, 2002). In Chapter 6 we therefore examined whether and how the social context of girls who participate in Girls Work influences them in how they shape their lives. We used a mixed-method approach. The quantitative data were gathered with the same questionnaire as mentioned above, with a focus on whether social contexts influence girls' agency. The qualitative data were collected using a creative instrument with 14 respondents, which focus on how these social contexts influence girls' agency.

Within the microsystem, we found that the influence of almost all social contexts decreases as girls get older. Girls above 18 years choose to only remain in contact with social contexts that are supportive to them. As mentioned in the introduction, friendships among girls are intimate and important (Duits & De Bruyckere, 2013; Nijhof & Engels, 2015). However, friends have the least influence on girls who participate in Girls Work. As girls get older, their friendships become less intimate (Duits & De Bruyckere, 2013). However, this does not explain why friends have the least influence on girls of all ages. We argue that because girls have had bad experiences with former friendships, they therefore have trust issues with 'friends'. Within the macrosystem, it appeared that there are three contexts which have a strong influence on all girls: religion, cultural background and Dutch society. Girls with a non-Western background are the ones who were more influenced by social contexts within the macrosystem. Whether the influence of the social context is supportive or impeding is experienced differently by the girls. Girls find their social context supportive when they can talk to them about their future and when they support them (both emotionally and practically). When they are laughed at or when a social context tries to hinder them in how they wish to shape their lives, then this is seen as impeding. The above knowledge gives youth workers insight into how the social context influences girls and underlines the importance of collaborating with the social context and being aware of how girls are influenced by their social context.

REFLECTIONS ON THE MAIN FINDINGS

The findings of this thesis give a more comprehensive view on what the Girls Work method entails and on the outcomes of the Girls Work method. To substantiate a method, it is important to first describe the method (Van Yperen et al., 2017). This description of a method makes it possible to understand the method and to transfer it to other youth workers. The above findings can be summarized in a model which describes the Girls Work method (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.
Model of the Girls Work method.



* These methodic principles are more present in Girls Work with girls above 18 years (Chapter 4)
** Previous study has shown that this is one of the methodic principles of the Girls Work method (De Boer & Metz, 2014). However, in this thesis, we had to remove this methodic principle due to incorrect measurement, Therefore, the relation with the process and aim of Girls Work is unknown.
*** Participation in Girls Work is mainly effective for the development of intentionality (Chapter 3)
**** Girls who receive an individual approach (only individual or a combination of individual and group) show more self-reflection.

In the upper column, we describe the aim, different approaches and the target group of the Girls Work method, as used in our thesis. By adding this to the model we describe the characteristics of the Girls Work method to which this model is applicable. Differences within these characteristics of the Girls Work method (such as the intensity with which the girls meet) or the target group (such as cultural background) did not made a difference to the model (based on the findings of Chapters 3 and 4). This description is appropriate for the way in which the youth work providers included in this study offer Girls Work. When other youth work providers want to use the above model, they first need to make sure that their method fits this aim, that they use one of these approaches and that they focus on this target group.

The left column shows the methodical actions of the youth worker, which consist of the nine methodic principles. The model suggest that - with the exception of 'use of social context' - these methodic principles are present in all Girls Work approaches and are used for all of the girls who participate in Girls Work (based on the findings of Chapter 4).

In the right column of the model, we present the aim of Girls Work. In previous studies, the aim of Girls Work has been described as: to support girls between 10 and 23 years old with their identity development so that they are better able to shape their own lives on their way to adulthood (Batsleer, 2013; De Boer & Metz, 2014; Gemmeke et al., 2011; Van der Zande, 1991). Based on Chapter 2, we understand this aim theoretically as agency, as operationalized by Bandura (2006). In Chapter 2 and 5 we found that the process of developing agency can be understood theoretically as empowerment. Findings from Chapter 5 show that only when the youth worker focuses on all three components of empowerment, it leverages agency. The process of empowerment is influenced by the methodic principles. All the methodic principles contribute to the process of empowerment, but some of the methodic principles also influence the aim of Girls Work directly. Which methodic principles influence the aim and how is also indicated in the model. Due to an error in the software, it is currently unknown how the methodic principle 'use of social context' influences the aim and/or the process of Girls Work. Since previous research (De Boer & Metz, 2014) and meetings with youth workers indicate that this methodic principle is also one of the nine methodic principles of Girls Work, we included this in our model.

Towards a substantiated Girls Work method

As mentioned in the introduction, youth work providers and their youth workers hope to strengthen the quality and professionalization of Girls Work by substantiating the Girls Work method. In the above model, we describe the underlying mechanism of the Girls Work method. All the relations between each part of the method have been demonstrated in the current thesis through theoretical (Chapter 2) and empirical (Chapter 3, 4 and 5) research. A theoretical substantiation is needed to make it more likely that the method is effective (Van Yperen et al., 2017). By substantiating the Girls Work method theoretically, youth workers find guidelines for their actions and the aim and process of Girls Work is explained. The above model was proposed based on the theoretical substantiation. The next step was to empirically substantiate a method, which would confirm the proposed model and make the underlying mechanism of the model visible. We therefore argue that the above model could be used to explain and substantiate the Girls Work method. The above model explains and substantiates what it is that youth workers do in contact with girls, what they work on and how they achieve this. This could increase the quality of the work, because it offers youth workers a model with which to act more deliberately. This is important for the professionalization of youth work, which eventually could lead to more appreciation for this field (Metz, 2011b).

The above model is valid for the Girls Work method targeting the different girls who participate in Girls Work. The results show that different person-related factors of girls did not influence the outcomes. However, one factor did influence the outcomes: the age of girls influenced the development of girls' agency. This suggests that as girls get older they will develop agency, also without participation in Girls Work. All of the analyses in this study were therefore controlled for the age of girls. In the above model, only the results which were controlled for age were included in the model, which makes this model valid for all person-related factors of girls. In our study, we also included differences between different Girls Work providers (such as whether or not Girls Work was situated in urban or rural areas, different Girls Work approaches, the intensity of how often Girls Work was offered, etc.). We only found that girls who received an individual approach (girls who participate only in the one-on-one approach, as well as girls who use a group approach but also talk to their youth worker individually), showed higher levels of self-reflection. Other factors did not influence the results, and therefore we argue that the above model is valid for all youth work providers who offer Girls Work in the Netherlands.

This model also contributes to the policy of professional youth work across Europe – i.e., to work more evidence-based (Dunne et al., 2014) - since the above model provides insight into the outcomes and the underlying mechanisms of Girls Work. Although the type of research we describe in this research leads to plausible assumptions about the effectiveness of the method (Van Yperen et al., 2017), we cannot make final statements on the effectiveness of the Girls Work method. To do so requires a more comprehensive testing of the model, with a research design which demonstrates that the results can indeed be attributed to the method (Van Yperen et al., 2017). Nevertheless, with this thesis, youth work providers can show others the outcomes of their work, which is important for the recognition of Girls Work and the maintenance of funding (Dunne et al., 2014; Van der Zwet, 2018).

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

The current thesis has a number of strengths as well as limitations. In this paragraph, we only discuss the overall strengths and limitations of the current thesis, since the strengths and limitations of the individual studies were discussed in Chapters 2 to 6.

One of the main strengths of the current thesis is the use of the partnership approach (Gilovich, 1993; Marsh, 2007). This approach means that researchers, professionals and teachers share a responsibility for the research process (Van der Mheen, 2019). Together with the professionals (managers and youth workers), we formulated the research questions and discussed the research methods and data collection and the interpretation of the results. Within this approach we distinguished two groups: the masterclass (which consisted of 16 experienced youth workers working in Girls Work) and the girls group (which consisted of 16 girls participating in Girls Work). Thanks to this approach, we ensured that the research methods were appropriate to the Girls Work method, that the outcomes could be validated, and that we could have access to the target group. This approach furthermore ensured that the research and the outcomes are valid for and contribute to the Girls Work practice (see also the method sections of the individual studies). Indeed, the findings of this study can be applied directly to the practice of Girls Work, creating mutual benefit for both practice and science (Van der Mheen, 2019). In this partnership approach, we also translated the results of the current thesis into a (Dutch) handbook for professionals and students, in which the Girls Work method and its substantiation are described in a more accessible manner for (new) youth workers.

Another strength of this thesis is that it combines a literature study with both quantitative and qualitative research designs. According to Van Yperen et al. (2017), this makes it more likely that the method proves effective. The literature study (Chapter 2) developed an understanding of the main concepts to substantiate the Girls Work method theoretically, which then formed the basis of the model for the Girls Work method. The quantitative study (Chapter, 3, 4, 5) subsequently focused on empirically testing this model. Additionally, since the social context of the girls plays an important role in the development of agency, we used a mixed-method research design (Chapter 6) to gain a better understanding of this role of the social context. For this we used a creative research instrument which encouraged the respondents to reflect more on their own experiences and to help them express themselves (Bartelink, Boendermaker, & Vliet, 2013; Gold, Wigram, & Elefant, 2006;). The different research designs have led to a comprehensive model for the Girls Work method, which integrates both theoretical and empirical substantiation. Nevertheless, because of the research design, we are unable to determine unequivocally that the results can be attributed to the method. To do so requires a more comprehensive testing of the model.

The last strength is that the current thesis builds on earlier research on the professionalization of Girls Work and mixed youth work in the Netherlands. Earlier and current studies on professional youth work focus on the development of methods for youth work (see for example, Metz & Sonneveld, 2012; Awad, Manders, Metz, Todorovic, & Sonneveld, 2018). Already in 2012 and 2014, De Boer and Metz described the aim of Girls Work and identified its methodic principles, based on interviews and focus groups with youth workers. Metz (2016) explained why methodic principles are being used for the substantiation of Girls Work. In this way, we contribute to the development of a body of knowledge of professional youth work.

A limitation of our study is that we did not include other factors that could influence the above model. For example, Girls Work focuses on girls living in vulnerable circumstances, but we did not check to what extent these girls actually live in vulnerable circumstances. It could be that some girls are more vulnerable, or are living in more vulnerable circumstances, than other girls. Whether or not this would influence the above model is unknown. Also, due to an error in the software of the quantitative data, we were unable to measure one of the methodic principles: use of social context. Therefore, we currently do not know whether youth workers use the social context of girls and whether this influences the above model.

Lastly, the current thesis focuses only on the Girls Work method offered by youth work providers in the Netherlands. Therefore, the above model and the findings cannot be generalized to other countries. As mentioned in the introduction, Girls Work exists in most European countries. It would therefore be interesting to repeat this study in other countries. However, it could be that Girls Work is conceived and/or arranged differently in other countries. For example, we know that professional youth work in the Netherlands are better able to reach youth with migrant backgrounds than professional youth work in other countries (De Meere & Stoutjesdijk, 2019; Sonneveld, Metz, & Manders, 2019). In this thesis, a large proportion of the respondents have a migrant background, which could imply that youth work providers also manage to reach girls with migrant backgrounds in their Girls Work activities. Whether this also applies to Girls Work in other countries is currently unknown.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the main findings of this thesis and the limitations of this study, we have formulated the following recommendations for both further research and for the practice of Girls Work.

Recommendations for further research

Examine the methodic principle 'use of social context'. In our study, we did not measure 'use of social context' correctly, and therefore we excluded this methodic principle in our quantitative study. Therefore, it is currently not known whether youth workers collaborate with the social context of girls and whether this contributes directly or indirectly to girls' agency. However, in our qualitative study we did ask how the social context of girls influences their agency. Based on that, we found indications that this methodic principle contributes to the development of agency. As a follow-up to this study, we recommend focusing on how often youth workers collaborate with the social context, and what this collaboration entails.

Study the effectiveness of the model for the Girls Work method. Our current thesis focuses only on substantiating the Girls Work method, thereby offering Girls Work practitioners more insight into their work. The next step could be to conduct a study on the effectiveness of the Girls Work method. However, the current thesis did not aim to examine the effectiveness. Building on the findings of this study, we recommend using a longitudinal design to test this model. The questionnaire used in this study could be offered to girls who just started participating in Girls Work and again after 1 year

(and after 2 years etc.), to examine whether a girl's participation in Girls Work actually contributes to developing her agency. Another follow-up study to our study could be to have youth workers keep a diary in which they write down what they did in contact with a girl and what the results of this action were on the girls. This could reveal whether the methodic principles of Girls Work are actually present and how youth workers use them.

Compare the girls who participate in Girls Work with the girls who participate in mixed youth work. Since there are also girls who only participate in mixed youth work, we recommend as a follow-up study to compare the girls participating in Girls Work with girls who only participate in mixed youth work. It would be interesting to know whether girls with specific background variables prefer to participate in only Girls Work, or only mixed youth work, or a combination of the two approaches. This could help to build more recognition for the Girls Work practice. However, this was not the aim of the current thesis.

Recommendations for Girls Work practice

Use the model to deliberately act methodically within Girls Work. The above model is based on how youth workers within Girls Work already work in contact with girls. Youth workers could consult this model to examine whether they work according to this model. This could help them to work more actively towards supporting girls in shaping their lives. Also, this model could be used to train new youth workers who (want to) work in Girls Work. To this end we translated the model and the findings of the current thesis into a practical book for professionals.

Use the model to substantiate the Girls Work method for municipalities, youth work providers and other professionals. As described in the introduction, youth workers who work with girls could not demonstrate the results of the Girls Work method, causing several problems. The above model could be used to help third parties understand what youth workers do in contact with girls, and how this contributes to achieving the aim of girls work. With this, we hope to contribute to the professionalization the Girls Work practice.

Within a group approach, youth workers must have attention for individual girls. Girls Work has different approaches: an individual approach, a group approach and a combination of both group and individual approach. Results suggest that when Girls Work has an individual component (the individual approach or the combination of both individual and group approach), this has an influence on the self-reflection of girls (Chapter 3). It is

therefore advisable when youth workers choose for a group approach to also approach girls individually.

Examine which and how social contexts influence girls and collaborate with the context to support the girls/target group. The social context of girls influences them in developing agency. How girls experience the influence of social contexts depends on the individual girl. It is therefore recommended to consider the contextual factors of each girl who participates in Girls Work. With this knowledge youth workers can collaborate more actively and take into account the role of the girls' social contexts.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The current thesis contributes to understanding whether and how the Girls Work method contributes to how girls who participate in Girls Work shape their own life. As described in Chapter 1, youth workers who work in Girls Work have difficulty substantiating their work and therefore they struggle to have their work acknowledged by other professionals, funders and sometimes even their own organizations. To our knowledge, which was confirmed in the partnership approach, not much research has been conducted on the Girls Work method. The findings suggest that Girls Work contributes to how girls shape their own lives (although only a significant contribution was found on setting intentions). How Girls Work contributes to how girls shape their own lives is described in the model for the Girls Work method. This model offers the Girls Work practice a theoretical and empirical substantiation of how their work contributes to the aim of Girls Work, which is in line with the contemporary policy on professional youth work towards adopting more evidence-based work methods. Also, with this model the Girls Work practice could help (new) youth workers to adopt a more goal-oriented approach (e.g. how to focus more on supporting girls to develop agency). It also gives the Girls Work practice the ability to demonstrate the results and the underlying mechanism of their work towards other professionals and funders. With this substantiation of the Girls Work method, we offer youth workers a way to strengthen the quality and professionalization of the Girls Work practice and to gain more recognition for Girls Work.

7

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Summary

Summary

Girls aged 10 to 23 develop an (adult) identity. Although most girls do not need professional support in this process, a significant and growing group of girls does. These girls are more vulnerable than others because they are on their own, the backlog of problems is too big, their social context is not able to provide the necessary support, or they are not aware of their potential vulnerability. To provide these girls with (extra) support, many youth work providers in the Netherlands offer Girls Work. Girls Work is a specific method of youth work that supports girls aged 10 to 23 in vulnerable situations with their identity development, so that they can shape their own lives. Although Girls Work has a long tradition and many youth work providers offer this method, there is no research-based substantiation of the Girls Work method. It would therefore help youth work providers to have a substantiated method of Girls Work that applies to the diversity of girls, development questions and contexts with which they work.

The aim of the current thesis is therefore to investigate whether and how the Girls Work method contributes to how girls shape their own lives. Several studies were conducted, the first of which examined the theoretical substantiation of the Girls Work method (Chapter 2). In the second study, research was conducted using a questionnaire to find an empirical basis for the Girls Work method (Chapters 3, 4 and 5). Finally, the third study examined the role of girls' social environment in (being able to) shape their own lives (Chapter 6).

Chapter 1 is the general introduction to this thesis. The first part of the introduction discusses what youth work entails and why separate attention for girls is important. Youth work focuses on supporting young people in their development into adulthood (Cullen, 2013; Metz, 2011) and has a strong focus on young people growing up in vulnerable situations (Declaration 2nd European Youth Work Convention, 2015; Metz, 2011). In the current thesis, we focus specifically on *professional* youth work. This means that youth work is carried out by skilled and paid professionals. Most youth work providers choose to offer a separate method within youth work focusing specifically on girls: Girls Work (De Meere & Stoutjesdijk, 2019). It focuses specifically on the group of girls between 10-23 years who are growing up in vulnerable circumstances. Youth workers offer these girls support in their identity development, so that they are better able to shape their own lives (De Boer & Metz, 2014). There are several reasons why youth work providers offer a separate program for girls. First, girls are underrepresented in mixed youth work activities. Only 10-30% of young people in youth

work are girls (Gemmeke et al., 2011). Reasons for this are that the offer does not always meet the needs of girls and that boys are more dominant, so girls tend to stay away. Also, some parents do not want their daughters to participate in youth work when (certain types of) boys are present (Metz, 2011; Valkesteijn, Bakker, Hilverdink & Metz, 2015; Van Drent & Te Poel, 1991). Another reason why youth work providers offer a separate program for girls is the difference between boys and girls in the process of becoming an adult. For example, we know that girls start puberty earlier and that girls in vulnerable situations are confronted more frequently with conflicting role expectations from the family, culture and Dutch society. Girls Work focuses more on the gender-specific vulnerabilities with which girls are confronted. For example, within Girls Work there is more attention for improving girls' self-image, sexual awareness and resilience than in mixed youth work (Gemmeke et al., 2011).

The second part of the introduction discusses why youth work providers need a substantiated method for Girls Work. Although Girls Work has existed for more than 100 years and many youth work providers offer it, there is currently no substantiated method for Girls Work (Metz, 2016). This means that youth workers who work with girls cannot measure their results or demonstrate the importance of a gender-specific approach. Three problems emerge as a result. First, since funding is linked to outcomes (Dunne et al., 2014) and no results of Girls Work are available, funders may threaten to cut back on Girls Work (Boomkens et al., 2018). In some municipalities this has already caused Girls Work to disappear. A second problem is that youth workers have difficulty describing and substantiating Girls Work, so that managers, other youth workers and social work professionals sometimes do not acknowledge the importance of Girls Work (Metz, 2016). This makes it harder for youth workers to collaborate with other professionals and sometimes they must even struggle to maintain Girls Work within their own organization. Third, due to the absence of a substantiated method, individual youth workers are forced to find out for themselves how to act with girls, without any existing knowledge to rely on. Hence, by substantiating the Girls Work method, youth workers hope to contribute to the quality and professionalization of Girls Work and to gain more recognition for Girls Work (Metz, 2016).

Chapter 2 presents the results of a conceptual analysis. To substantiate the Girls Work method, we first wanted to elaborate its theoretical basis. Using theoretical models to substantiate a method helps to specify the aim of the method, illustrate its value, provide a basis for understanding the method, give insight into how youth workers (can)

act according to the method, and establish a connection between policy and practice (Dunne et al., 2014; Van Yperen, Veerman, & Bijl, 2017). There are many theoretical concepts within Social Work theory that resonate with the principal aim of Girls Work. The use of the theoretical concepts of *agency* and *empowerment* were favored above other concepts because they focus on the positive development of people, are more strengths-based, and consider individuals within their social context. However, how these two theoretical concepts can be applied to the Girls Work method is currently unclear. Therefore, in Chapter 2 both theoretical concepts are analyzed by means of a conceptual analysis to understand their meaning and relationship to each other and to investigate how these concepts can help to theoretically substantiate the Girls Work method. Results show that the concept of agency (Bandura, 2001) can be used to theoretically understand the aim of Girls Work. Agency is the ability of people to shape their own lives, in relation to their own values and in alignment with their social context. The concept consists of four properties: intentionality, forethought, self-reactivity and self-reflection. The concept of empowerment (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 1995) can theoretically be understood as the process of acquiring agency. Empowerment consists of 3 components: interactional component, intrapersonal component and behavioral component.

In **Chapter 3** we present the results of a cross-sectional quantitative study in which we assessed whether participating in Girls Work contributes to how girls (learn) to shape their own lives, described in Chapter 2 as "agency". Through an online questionnaire with 393 girls who participate in Girls Work, we assessed differences between factors such as how long girls have been participating in Girls Work and the extent to which they (are able to) acquire agency. As the age of girls turned out to have an important influence on their agency, all subsequent analyses were controlled for age. We also found a relationship between how long girls participate in Girls Work and one of the properties of agency: intentionality. This suggests that Girls Work is mainly effective in helping girls think about what they want for themselves or to change something in their lives. Since agency is about intentionally doing something, setting an intention is a prerequisite to action. We did not find a significant relationship between participation in Girls Work and the other three properties of agency.

In **Chapter 4**, based on the same questionnaire as mentioned before, we examined how youth workers act methodically to achieve the aim (understood as agency). In a previous study, nine methodic principles of Girls Work were identified (De Boer & Metz,

2014). These are the principles that guide youth workers in their methodical actions in contact with the target group (Metz & Sonneveld, 2012). Chapter 4 examines the presence of the methodic principles, from the girls' perspective. In our study, we had to exclude the methodic principle of "use of social context" due to incorrect measurement. All other methodic principles were recognized by the girls, which confirms the use of these principles for the Girls Work method. Some results are noteworthy. 1. Girls above 18 years recognized two methodic principles more than other girls: safety and boundaries. Although older girls feel safer in Girls Work than younger girls, the findings do not suggest that youth workers have more attention for feelings of safety with older girls. It could be that older girls are more conscious of feelings of safety and therefore recognize this methodic principle more than younger girls. For the methodic principle of boundaries, the results show that older girls - because they participate in Girls Work - know better what their own boundaries are, how to indicate their boundaries to others and are better aware of accepted behavior. It could be that youth workers have more attention for this, because girls above 18 years who participate in Girls Work have more problems with indicating their boundaries. 2. The cultural background of the girls, how long they have participated in Girls Work and the type of Girls Work did not influence the recognition of the methodic principles. We therefore argue that these methodic principles are valid for the different girls who participate in different Girls Work approaches.

In **Chapter 5** we examine the relation between the concepts of agency, empowerment and the methodic principles. Using the same questionnaire as used in Chapters 3 and 4, we discovered that the methodic principles are a predictor of empowerment and that empowerment is a predictor of agency. This suggests that empowerment can be seen as the process through which youth workers support girls in how they shape their lives (agency) with their actions (expressed in the methodic principles). This only applied when all three components (intrapersonal, interactional and behavioral component) of empowerment were included, suggesting that when focusing on empowerment, youth workers should always focus on all three components of empowerment. We also found that the methodic principles also directly predict agency and therefore we argue that the methodic principles contribute to both the process and the aim of the Girls Work method.

The social context plays an important role in how girls (can) shape their lives (Isaacs, 2013), but it is unknown how this affects the girls who participate in Girls Work who

live in vulnerable circumstances. Youth workers therefore indicate that they need more knowledge about which and how social contexts influence girls in shaping their lives. **Chapter 6** presents the results of a mixed-methods study. The quantitative data shows *which* social context influences girls and to *what degree*. These data were collected using the same questionnaire as mentioned above, with an emphasis on whether social contexts influence girls' agency. The qualitative data were collected using a creative instrument with 14 respondents, which focused on *how* these social contexts influence girls' agency. Two systems within the social context were investigated: the micro system (family, peers, partners, etc.) and the macro system (religion, culture, etc.) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within the microsystem, we found that the influence of almost all social contexts decreases as girls get older. A striking result was that friends have the least influence on girls of all ages who participate in Girls Work. We argue that because girls have had bad experiences with former friendships, they therefore have trust issues with 'friends'. Within the macrosystem, it appeared that there are three contexts which have a strong influence on all girls: religion, cultural background and Dutch society. Girls with a non-Western background are more influenced by social contexts within the macrosystem. Whether the influence of the social context is supportive or impeding is experienced differently by the girls. The above knowledge gives youth workers insight into how the social context influences girls and underlines the importance of collaborating with the social context and being aware of how girls are influenced by their social context.

In **Chapter 7** we present the general discussion of this thesis in which the main results are first presented and then translated into a model for substantiating the Girls Work method. This model describes the underlying mechanism of the Girls Work method. All the relations between each part of the method are demonstrated in the current thesis through theoretical and empirical research. We therefore argue that the model could be used to explain and substantiate the Girls Work method. It substantiates what it is that youth workers do in contact with girls (methodic principles), what they work on (agency) and how they achieve this (through empowerment). This could increase the quality of the work by offering youth workers a model with which to act more deliberately. This is important for the professionalization of youth work, which eventually could lead to more appreciation for this field (Metz, 2011b).

The presented model is valid for the Girls Work method targeting the different girls who participate in Girls Work. The results also show that various person-related factors of

girls did not influence the outcomes. However, one factor did influence the outcomes: the age of girls influenced the development of girls' agency. This suggests that as girls get older they will develop agency, also without participation in Girls Work. All of the analyses in this study were therefore controlled for the age of girls. In the above model, only the results which were controlled for age were included, which makes this model valid for all person-related factors of girls. In our study, we also included differences between different Girls Work providers (such as whether or not Girls Work was situated in urban or rural areas, different Girls Work approaches, the intensity of how often Girls Work was offered, etc.). We only found that girls who receive an individual approach (girls who participate only in the one-on-one approach, as well as girls who use a group approach but also talk to their youth worker individually), showed higher levels of self-reflection. Other factors did not influence the results, and therefore we argue that the above model is valid for all youth work providers who offer Girls Work in the Netherlands.

This model also contributes to the policy of professional youth work across Europe – i.e., to work more evidence-based (Dunne et al., 2014) - since the above model provides insight into the outcomes and the underlying mechanisms of Girls Work. Although the type of research we describe in this research leads to plausible assumptions about the effectiveness of the method (Van Yperen et al., 2017), we cannot make final statements on this matter. To do so requires a more comprehensive testing of the model, with a research design which demonstrates that the results can indeed be attributed to the method (Van Yperen et al., 2017). Nevertheless, this thesis can help youth work providers to show others the outcomes of their work, which is important for the recognition of Girls Work and the maintenance of funding (Dunne et al., 2014; Van der Zwet, 2018). Chapter 7 also discusses the strengths and limitations of the research and makes recommendations with regard to practice and follow-up research.

The current thesis contributes to understanding whether and how the Girls Work method helps girls to shape their own lives. It finds a significant contribution with respect to setting intentions. How Girls Work contributes to how girls shape their own lives is described in the model for the Girls Work method. This model offers the Girls Work practice a theoretical and empirical substantiation of how their work contributes to the aim of Girls Work, which is in line with the contemporary policy on professional youth work towards adopting more evidence-based work methods. Also, with this model the Girls Work practice could help (new) youth workers to adopt

a more goal-oriented approach (i.e., to focus more on supporting girls to develop agency). It also enables the Girls Work practitioners to demonstrate the results and the underlying mechanism of their work towards other professionals and funders. With this substantiation of the Girls Work method, we offer youth workers a way to strengthen the quality and professionalization of the Girls Work practice and to gain more recognition for Girls Work.

Samenvatting (Dutch Summary)

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Meiden in de leeftijd van 10 tot 23 jaar ontwikkelen een (volwassen) identiteit. Hoewel de meeste meiden hierbij geen ondersteuning nodig hebben van beroepskrachten, heeft een aanzienlijke en bovendien groeiende groep meiden hier wel hulp bij nodig. Deze meiden zijn kwetsbaarder dan anderen doordat zij er alleen voor staan, de achterstand of problemen te groot zijn, hun netwerk niet in staat is om de benodigde ondersteuning te bieden of omdat zij zich niet bewust zijn van hun potentiële kwetsbaarheid. Om deze meiden (extra) te ondersteunen, bieden veel jongerenwerkorganisaties in Nederland meidenwerk aan. Meidenwerk is een specifieke methodiek van het jongerenwerk en ondersteunt meiden tussen de 10 en 23 jaar in kwetsbare situaties bij hun identiteitsontwikkeling, zodat zij zelf hun leven kunnen vormgeven. Hoewel het meidenwerk een lange traditie kent en veel jongerenwerkorganisaties het aanbieden, ontbreekt een met onderzoek onderbouwde methodiek. Jongerenwerkorganisaties hebben behoefte aan een onderbouwde methodiek, die toepasbaar is voor de diversiteit aan meiden, ontwikkelingsvragen en contexten waarmee en waarbinnen zij werken.

Doel van dit proefschrift is daarom onderzoeken of en hoe het meidenwerk meiden in kwetsbare situaties ondersteunt bij het zelf vorm (kunnen) geven aan het eigen leven. Om dat te onderzoeken zijn er verschillende studies uitgevoerd. In de eerste studie is onderzocht wat de theoretische onderbouwing van het meidenwerk is (Hoofdstuk 2). In de tweede studie is met behulp van een vragenlijst onderzoek gezocht naar een empirische onderbouwing van het meidenwerk (Hoofdstuk 3, 4 en 5). Tot slot is in de derde studie onderzocht wat de rol is van de omgeving van meiden bij het zelf vorm (kunnen) geven aan het eigen leven (Hoofdstuk 6).

Hoofdstuk 1 is de algemene introductie van dit proefschrift. In het eerste deel van de introductie wordt besproken wat het jongerenwerk inhoudt en waarom aparte aandacht voor meiden hierin belangrijk is. Het jongerenwerk richt zich op het ondersteunen van jongeren bij het volwassen worden (Cullen, 2013; Metz, 2011) en heeft een sterke focus op jongeren die opgroeien in kwetsbare situaties (Declaration 2nd European Youth Work Convention, 2015; Metz, 2011). In het huidige proefschrift richten wij ons op *professioneel* jongerenwerk. Dit houdt in dat het jongerenwerk wordt uitgevoerd door geschoolde en betaalde professionals. Veel jongerenwerkorganisaties kiezen ervoor om binnen het jongerenwerk een apart aanbod voor meiden te bieden: het meidenwerk

(De Meere & Stoutjesdijk, 2019). Het richt zich op meisjes en jonge vrouwen (hierna: meiden) tussen de 10 en 23 jaar die opgroeien in kwetsbare situaties. Jongerenwerkers bieden deze meiden ondersteuning in hun identiteitsontwikkeling, zodat zij zelf (leren om) hun leven vorm te geven (De Boer & Metz, 2014). Er zijn verschillende redenen waarom jongerenwerkorganisaties kiezen voor een aparte plek voor meiden. Ten eerste blijkt dat meiden ondervertegenwoordigd zijn in het jongerenwerk. Slechts 10-30% van de jongeren in het jongerenwerk is een meisje (Gemmeke et al., 2011). Redenen hiervoor zijn dat het aanbod niet altijd aansluit bij behoeften van meiden, jongens meer dominant aanwezig zijn waardoor meiden wegblijven en omdat sommige ouders hun dochters niet willen laten deelnemen aan jongerenwerk wanneer (bepaalde type) jongens aanwezig zijn (Metz, 2011; Valkesteijn, Bakker, Hilverdink & Metz, 2015; Van Drent & Te Poel, 1991). Een andere reden waarom jongerenwerkorganisaties een aparte plek bieden voor meiden in het jongerenwerk is de verschillen tussen jongens en meiden in het volwassen worden. Zo weten we dat de puberteit bij meiden eerder start en dat meiden in kwetsbare situaties meer geconfronteerd worden met tegenstrijdige rolverwachtingen vanuit het gezin, cultuur en de Nederlandse samenleving. Meidenwerk richt zich meer op de kwetsbaarheden in het volwassen worden die worden veroorzaakt door het vrouw-zijn. Zo is er binnen het meidenwerk meer aandacht voor het verbeteren van het zelfbeeld van meiden, seksuele bewustwording en weerbaarheid, dan in gemengd jongerenwerk (Gemmeke et al., 2011).

In het tweede deel van de introductie wordt besproken waarom jongerenwerkaanbieders behoefte hebben aan een onderbouwde methodiek voor het meidenwerk. Hoewel het meidenwerk al meer dan 100 jaar bestaat en veel jongerenwerkorganisaties het aanbieden, ontbreekt momenteel een onderbouwde methodiek voor het meidenwerk (Metz, 2016). Hierdoor kunnen jongerenwerkers die met meiden werken hun resultaten niet aantonen of het belang van seksespecifiek werken benadrukken. Daardoor ontstaan er drie problemen. Ten eerste, omdat de financiers van het jongerenwerk (vooral gemeenten) en de samenleving de resultaten van hun investering willen zien, wordt de financiering momenteel gekoppeld aan de resultaten (Dunne et al., 2014). Omdat er voor het meidenwerk geen resultaten beschikbaar zijn, dreigen financiers om te bezuinigen op het meidenwerk (Boomkens, Rauwerdink-Nijland, Van der Grient, Van Trijp & Metz, 2018). In sommige gemeenten heeft dit zelfs geleid tot het verdwijnen van het meidenwerk. Een tweede probleem is dat jongerenwerkers moeite hebben met het beschrijven en onderbouwen van het meidenwerk en daardoor erkennen managers, andere jongerenwerkers en andere professionals het belang van meidenwerk niet.

Dit maakt het voor jongerenwerkers moeilijker om samen te werken met andere professionals en soms hebben ze zelfs moeite om meidenwerk binnen hun eigen organisatie te laten voortbestaan. Ten derde moeten individuele jongerenwerkers zelf uitvinden hoe ze met meiden moeten handelen en kunnen zij niet vertrouwen op bestaande kennis. Door het meidenwerk te onderbouwen, hopen jongerenwerkers de kwaliteit en effectiviteit van het meidenwerk te versterken en het meidenwerk meer erkenning te geven (Metz, 2016). In de derde deel van de introductie wordt het doel en de opbouw van het proefschrift gepresenteerd.

In **Hoofdstuk 2** worden de resultaten van het literatuuronderzoek gepresenteerd. Om de methodiek van het meidenwerk te kunnen onderbouwen hebben we eerst de methodiek onderbouwd met behulp van theoretische concepten. Door gebruik te maken van theoretische concepten wordt het doel van de methodiek gespecificeerd, de waarde van de methodiek geïllustreerd, een basis geboden voor professionals en het verband gezocht tussen beleid en praktijk (Dunne et al., 2014; Van Yperen, Veerman & Bijl, 2017). Er zijn veel theoretische concepten die gebruikt worden in het sociaal domein die kunnen aansluiten bij het doel en de werkwijze van het meidenwerk. De voorkeur werd gegeven aan het gebruik van de theoretische concepten *agency* en *empowerment*, omdat ze zich richten op positieve ontwikkeling van mensen, meer krachtgericht zijn en individuen in hun sociale omgeving zien.

Hoe deze theoretische concepten kunnen worden toegepast om de methodiek van het meidenwerk te onderbouwen, is momenteel onbekend. Daarom worden in hoofdstuk 2 beide theoretische concepten geanalyseerd middels een conceptuele analyse om hun betekenis en relatie tot elkaar te begrijpen en te onderzoeken hoe deze concepten de methodiek van het meidenwerk theoretisch kunnen onderbouwen. Resultaten laten zien dat het concept van agency (Bandura, 2001) gebruikt kan worden om het doel van het meidenwerk theoretisch te kunnen begrijpen. Agency is het vermogen van mensen om zelf vorm te geven aan het eigen leven, in relatie tot de eigen waarden en in afstemming met de omgeving van meiden. Het concept bestaat uit vier eigenschappen: intentionaliteit, voorbedachtzaamheid, zelfreactiviteit en zelfreflectie. Het concept empowerment (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 1995) kan theoretisch worden begrepen als het proces om agency te verwerven. Empowerment bestaat uit 3 componenten: interactionele component, intrapersoonlijke component en gedragscomponent.

In **Hoofdstuk 3** presenteren we de resultaten van een cross-sectionele kwantitatieve studie waarin we hebben onderzocht of deelname aan het meidenwerk daadwerkelijk bijdraagt aan het (leren) zelf vorm te geven aan het eigen leven, in hoofdstuk 2 beschreven als 'agency'. Via een online vragenlijst bij 393 meiden die deelnemen aan het meidenwerk hebben we verschillen onderzocht tussen factoren zoals hoe lang meiden deelnemen aan meidenwerk en de mate waarin meiden (in staat zijn) agency te verwerven. De leeftijd van meiden bleek een significante invloed te hebben op de mate van agency. Daarom zijn alle latere analyses gecontroleerd voor leeftijd. Ook vonden we een relatie tussen hoe lang meiden deelnemen aan meidenwerk en een van de eigenschappen van agency: intentionaliteit. Dit suggereert dat meidenwerk vooral effectief is in het ondersteunen van meiden om na te denken over wat ze voor zichzelf willen of om iets in hun leven te veranderen. Aangezien intentionaliteit gaat over het opzettelijk doen van iets, is het stellen van een intentie een voorwaarde voor actie. We vonden geen significante relaties tussen deelname aan meidenwerk en de andere drie eigenschappen van agency.

In **Hoofdstuk 4** wordt op basis van dezelfde vragenlijst onderzocht hoe jongerenwerkers methodisch handelen om het doel (begrepen als agency) te bereiken. In een eerdere studie werden daarvoor negen *methodische principes* van het meidenwerk geïdentificeerd (De Boer & Metz, 2014). Dit zijn principes die richting geven aan het methodisch handelen van jongerenwerkers in contact met de doelgroep (Metz & Sonneveld, 2012). Hoofdstuk 4 onderzoekt de aanwezigheid van de methodische principes, vanuit het perspectief van de meiden. In onze studie moesten we het methodische principe 'werken met de omgeving' uitsluiten vanwege onjuiste meting. Alle andere methodische principes werden herkend door de meiden, wat het gebruik van deze methodische principes voor de methodiek van het meidenwerk bevestigt. Enkele opvallende resultaten zijn noemenswaardig. 1. Meiden ouder dan 18 jaar herkennen twee methodische principes meer dan jongere meiden: veiligheid en grenzen. Oudere meiden voelen zich veiliger in het meidenwerk dan jongere meiden. De bevindingen suggereren echter niet dat jongerenwerkers meer aandacht hebben voor veiligheidsgevoelens bij oudere meiden. Het kan zijn dat oudere meiden zich meer bewust zijn van gevoelens van veiligheid en daarom dit methodische principe meer herkennen dan jongere meiden. Voor het methodische principe van grenzen laten de resultaten zien dat oudere meiden - omdat ze meedoen aan meidenwerk - beter weten wat hun eigen grenzen zijn, hoe ze hun grenzen aan anderen kunnen aangeven en zich beter bewust zijn van geaccepteerd gedrag. Het kan zijn dat jongerenwerker hier meer aandacht voor heeft, omdat meiden vanaf 18 jaar die meedoen aan meidenwerk

meer moeite hebben met het aangeven van hun grenzen. 2. De culturele achtergrond van de meiden, hoe lang ze al deelnemen aan meidenwerk en type meidenwerk bleek geen invloed op de herkenning van de methodische principes. We stellen daarom dat deze methodische principes geldig zijn voor de verschillende meiden die deelnemen aan verschillende meidenwerk-benaderingen.

In **Hoofdstuk 5** wordt de gehele methodiek van het meidenwerk empirisch getoetst. In andere woorden, we onderzochten op welke manier de methodische principes bijdragen aan het doel (agency) en het proces (empowerment) van het meidenwerk. Middels dezelfde vragenlijst als gebruikt in hoofdstuk 3 en 4 ontdekten we dat de methodische principes een voorspeller zijn van empowerment en dat empowerment een voorspeller is van agency. Dit suggereert dat empowerment kan worden gezien als het proces waarbij jongerenwerkers meiden ondersteunen in de manier waarop ze hun leven vormgeven (agency) door hun handelen (uitgedrukt in de methodische principes). Dit was alleen van toepassing wanneer alle drie componenten (intrapersoonlijke, interactionele en gedragscomponent) van empowerment waren opgenomen, wat suggereert dat jongerenwerkers zich altijd moeten concentreren op alle drie componenten van empowerment. We hebben ook geconstateerd dat de methodische principes de agency van meiden direct voorspellen en daarom stellen we dat de methodische principes bijdragen aan zowel het proces als het doel van meidenwerk.

De sociale omgeving speelt een belangrijke rol in hoe meiden hun leven (kunnen) vormgeven (Isaacs, 2013), maar het is onbekend hoe dit invloed heeft op de meiden van het meidenwerk, die opgroeien in kwetsbare situaties. Jongerenwerkers geven daarom aan dat ze meer kennis nodig hebben over welke en hoe sociale omgevingen meiden beïnvloeden bij het vormgeven van hun leven. **Hoofdstuk 6** presenteert de resultaten van een mixed-methods onderzoek. De kwantitatieve gegevens laten zien *welke* sociale omgeving meiden beïnvloedt en in welke mate. Deze gegevens zijn verzameld met dezelfde vragenlijst als hierboven vermeld, met de nadruk op de vraag of sociale contexten de agency van meiden beïnvloeden. De kwalitatieve gegevens zijn verzameld met behulp van een creatief instrument met 14 respondenten, dat zich richtte op *hoe* deze sociale contexten de agency van meiden beïnvloeden. Twee systemen binnen de sociale context zijn onderzocht: het microsysteem (familie, leeftijdsgenoten, partners etc.) en het macrosysteem (religie, cultuur etc.) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Binnen het microsysteem ontdekten we dat de invloed van bijna alle sociale contexten afneemt naarmate meiden ouder worden. Een opvallend resultaat was dat vrienden de minste invloed hebben op de meiden van alle leeftijden die

deelnemen aan meidenwerk. We verklaren dit door de slechte ervaringen van deze meiden met eerdere vriendschappen. Binnen het macrosysteem bleek dat drie omgevingen een sterke invloed hebben op alle meiden: religie, culturele achtergrond en de Nederlandse samenleving. Dit gold sterker voor meiden met een niet-westerse achtergrond. Welke omgeving ondersteunend of belemmerend is, wordt door de meiden anders ervaren. Bovenstaande resultaten geeft jongerenwerkers inzicht in hoe de sociale context meiden beïnvloedt en onderstreept het belang van samenwerken met de sociale context en bewust zijn van hoe meiden worden beïnvloed door hun sociale context.

In **Hoofdstuk 7** presenteren we de discussie van dit proefschrift waarin eerst de belangrijkste resultaten worden gepresenteerd, en waarna deze worden vertaald in een model voor de onderbouwing van de methodiek van het meidenwerk. In dit model wordt de onderliggende werking van de methodiek van het meidenwerk beschreven. Alle relaties tussen elk onderdeel van de methodiek zijn aangetoond in het huidige proefschrift door middel van theoretisch en empirisch onderzoek. We stellen dat het model gebruikt zou kunnen worden om de methodiek van het meidenwerk uit te leggen en te onderbouwen. Het onderbouwt namelijk wat jongerenwerkers in contact met meiden doen (methodische principes), waar ze aan werken (agency) en hoe ze dat bereiken (via empowerment). Dit zou de kwaliteit van het werk kunnen verhogen, omdat het jongerenwerkers een model biedt om bewuster te handelen. Dit is belangrijk voor de professionalisering van jongerenwerk, wat uiteindelijk kan leiden tot meer waardering voor dit vakgebied (Metz, 2011b).

De resultaten laten ook zien dat verschillende persoonsgerelateerde factoren van meiden de uitkomsten niet beïnvloedden. Eén factor had echter wel invloed op de uitkomsten: de leeftijd van meiden beïnvloedde de ontwikkeling van de agency van meiden. Dit suggereert dat naarmate meiden ouder worden zij agency kunnen ontwikkelen, ook zonder deelname aan meidenwerk. Alle analyses in deze studie werden daarom gecontroleerd voor de leeftijd van meiden. In het model zijn alleen de resultaten opgenomen die op leeftijd waren gecontroleerd, wat dit model geldig maakt voor alle persoonsgerelateerde factoren van meiden. In ons onderzoek hebben we ook verschillen tussen verschillende vormen van meidenwerk opgenomen (zoals of meidenwerk al dan niet in stedelijke of landelijke gebieden was gelegen, verschillende benaderingen van meidenwerk, de intensiteit van hoe vaak meidenwerk werd aangeboden, enz.). We ontdekten dat alleen meiden die een individuele benadering ontvingen (meiden die alleen deelnemen aan de één-op-één benadering,

evenals meiden die een groepsbenadering gebruiken maar ook individueel met hun jongerenwerker praten), een hogere mate van zelfreflectie vertoonden. Andere factoren hadden geen invloed op de resultaten en daarom stellen we dat het model geldig is voor alle vormen van meidenwerk in Nederland.

Dit model draagt ook bij aan het beleid van professioneel jongerenwerk in heel Europa - d.w.z. om meer evidence-based te werken (Dunne et al., 2014). Hoewel het type onderzoek dat we in dit onderzoek beschrijven, leidt tot plausibele veronderstellingen over de effectiviteit van de methodiek (Van Yperen et al., 2017), kunnen we geen definitieve uitspraken doen over de effectiviteit van meidenwerk. Hiervoor is een meer uitgebreide onderzoek van het model nodig, met een onderzoeksdesign dat aantoont dat de resultaten inderdaad aan de methodiek kunnen worden toegeschreven (Van Yperen et al., 2017). Niettemin kunnen jongerenwerkaanbieders met dit proefschrift anderen de resultaten van hun werk laten zien, wat belangrijk is voor de erkenning van meidenwerk en het behoud van financiering (Dunne et al., 2014; Van der Zwet, 2018). Ook wordt in hoofdstuk 7 de krachten en beperkingen van het onderzoek besproken en worden er aanbevelingen gedaan ten aanzien van de praktijk en vervolgonderzoek.

Het huidige proefschrift draagt bij aan het inzicht of en hoe het meidenwerk bijdraagt aan de manier waarop meiden die deelnemen aan het meidenwerk hun eigen leven vormgeven. De bevindingen suggereren dat meidenwerk bijdraagt aan de manier waarop meiden hun eigen leven vormgeven (hoewel er alleen een significante bijdrage werd gevonden aan intentionaliteit). Hoe het meidenwerk bijdraagt aan de manier waarop meiden hun eigen leven vormgeven, wordt beschreven in het model voor methodiek van het meidenwerk. Dit model biedt de praktijk van het meidenwerk een theoretische en empirische onderbouwing van hoe hun werk bijdraagt aan het doel van meidenwerk, wat in lijn is met het huidige beleid van professioneel jongerenwerk om meer evidence-based methoden toe te passen. Ook zou met dit model de praktijk van het meidenwerk (nieuwe) jongerenwerkers kunnen helpen om een meer doelgerichte aanpak te volgen (bijvoorbeeld hoe meer aandacht te besteden aan het ondersteunen van meiden bij het ontwikkelen van agency). Het geeft de meidenwerk praktijk ook de mogelijkheid om de resultaten en het onderliggende mechanisme van hun werk aan andere professionals en financiers te demonstreren. Met deze onderbouwing van het meidenwerk bieden we jongerenwerkers een manier om de kwaliteit en professionalisering van het meidenwerk te versterken en meer erkenning te krijgen voor het meidenwerk.

Dankwoord

DANKWOORD

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Cynthia Boomkens

Amsterdam, Juli 2020

Curriculum Vitae

Curriculum vitae

Cynthia Boomkens was born on 13 August 1989 in Hilversum. She first studied Social Educational Care at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences from 2006 – 2010. In 2012, she obtained her Master Degree in Pedagogical Sciences at the University of Amsterdam. The emphasis was on Studies of Child Rearing and Family Support. During her Master study she worked as a junior researcher at the research group of Implementation and Effectiveness in Youth Care Services at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. Since 2011, she also works as a Social Work lecturer at the same institution. From 2014 until 2019, she joined the research group Youth Spot, which focuses on examining how youth work must innovate to retain its connection to young people and society while at the same time improving in terms of professionalism and effectiveness. Here, she started working on the Girls Work project, which was a small project back then. Together with the Girls Work practice and her colleagues, she received funding to expand this project. This led to her PhD research, which she has conducted since 2017 as a science practitioner at the Academic Collaborative Center Social Work at Tranzo (Tilburg University). In 2019, her research project on Girls Work received the award for 'Best research of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, 2019' (1st place) and the award for 'Best research of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences for the municipality of Amsterdam, 2019' (3rd place).


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DOCK


Hogeschool van Amsterdam


Dynamo


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Jeugd- &
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participe


JONGEREN
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Tranzo
Scientific center
for care and
wellbeing


SiA